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## CHILD OF THE CONCENTRATION CAMP

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### BACKGROUND.

My name is Donald Krausz and I was born in Schiedam, Holland on the 17<sup>th</sup> July 1930. My father was a Persian carpet merchant of Hungarian nationality while my mother was English. I have a sister, Irene, who is five years younger than I. We are Jews. For the first six years of my life we lived in Schiedam and I went to school there, while my father commuted daily to Rotterdam where he had his business. Rotterdam is the nearest large city; today Schiedam is no more than a suburb of Rotterdam. We were very friendly with our neighbours, a Christian family by the name of van Hulten. Their younger son, Jan, was my closest friend, and I went to school there for one year.

The van Hultens became our best friends. Not only were they our neighbours, but Mr. van Hulten, who was headmaster of a primary school, spoke fluent English and was thus able to help my mother adjust to a foreign country where she did not understand the language. During the war they took risks on our behalf that could have caused them a great deal of trouble had they been found out.

Ours was a happy family without being exuberant or demonstrative. I hardly ever saw my parents quarrel and they were loving and supportive towards each other. My father had nine brothers and sisters of whom six lived in Holland. The patriarch of the family was my father's uncle Baczi who was married to my father's sister, Lenke. The family kept in close touch with one another and most of them were involved in the Persian carpet trade. I even remember receiving a Persian cushion as a birthday present when I was about eight years old, a rather odd gift for a child of that age. My father had many friends, both Jewish and non-Jewish, who used to come to our home and they had regular bridge games. At times the whole family would gather at my aunt Lenke.

In 1937 we moved to Rotterdam where my father had rented an old five-story house on the North Blaak which was a street on the side of a tree-lined canal. The other side of the canal was called the South Blaak. Some distance to the left of our house was the stock exchange, a massive building known as the Bourse.

Like many of the old Dutch houses, ours stood between two streets, so that the front entrance (the shop) was in the North Blaak, while the rear (living quarters) entrance was in a street called the Vissers Dijk. Our shop was at street level, the office and warehouse on the first floor, while the remaining three stories and the

attic were used as living quarters. Like most old Dutch houses, this was a high, narrow house, with only two or three rooms per storey.

The North Blaak was a business street with large shops, a departmental store and of course, the Bourse. The Vissers Dijk, one street removed, consisted of some of the oldest houses in Rotterdam, many going back to the first few years of the seventeenth century. It was a lower class district with many prostitutes. I don't think my father anticipated that when he moved into this rather well-to-do North Blaak, that his son would be associating with their children.

I went to a Government primary school and had quite a few friends, both Jewish and Christian. After the war had started I even had a gang of my own. At no stage did I ever experience anti-Semitism from my neighbours, teachers, classmates or associates.

Although both my parents came from strictly orthodox homes we were not as observant as their parents had been. We belonged to the Orthodox Synagogue, called the Shul, lit candles on the Sabbath, but did not observe its rules, and celebrated the religious holidays. I never saw my father lay Tallis and Tefillin, which is the orthodox Jew's daily prayer ritual. We went to Shul on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur only, that is three days every year. From the age of seven I went to Cheder, which is the Jewish religious school. The first year I won a prize and the second I was expelled for missing too many classes. I don't remember my parents being particularly upset about this.

### THE WAR.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> May 1940, I was awakened by the noise of many aircraft. My parents then told me that we were at war and that the Germans had landed troops in Rotterdam. Before long the streets emptied and I saw Dutch marines in their black uniforms take up positions in the North and South Blaak. They stood in doorways or lay prone behind trees, all facing to the left of our street. Dutch infantry with fixed bayonets were meanwhile occupying the Vissers Dijk. We were told that the Bourse on the left corner of our block had been occupied by German troops.

Although it was obvious that we were in the front line, I did not feel a sense of danger. Our phone was working, we had running water and electricity, and I do not remember much shooting. The radio was still in Dutch hands and broadcast regular news bulletins. We were informed that Dutch Nazis had taken up arms against the government forces and that we should try and remember the voice of our familiar announcer, in case the Germans or the collaborators took over the radio station or set up their own.

The Dutch military in the Blaak now began to warn people not to appear at the windows. They were probably afraid that they might be shot at. One would hear a command: "Van de ramen weg!" ("Get away from the windows!") This would be repeated in a more strident tone, followed by a shot and the sound of breaking glass.

Some hours later a terrible noise was heard. The Dutch had lifted the paving stones in front of our house, dug a trench and mounted a machine gun, which commenced firing on the Germans in the Bourse.

Meanwhile, behind us in the Vissers Dijk, the soldiers stood guard, tense and alert. I noticed a window opening behind one of them; the soldier jumped and swung around, his gun at the ready. Then an arm clad in a lady's nightgown appeared holding a tray with sandwiches and a glass of milk. Rotterdam's prostitutes were doing their bit.

My father now gathered us all on the first floor, which was used as the warehouse. Many of the carpets were rolled and tied, and he stood these carpets up against the windows to prevent bullets or shrapnel from entering the room. We spent our first night of the war sleeping there on the floor.

The following day a house in our block was bombed and stood burning. Apart from the walls, those old houses were largely constructed of wood and because of the fighting, the fire brigade would not have been able to get near. I do not know whose decision it was to leave, or whether we were ordered to do so, but we packed as much clothing and personal possessions as we could carry and evacuated our home using the rear door in the Vissers Dijk.

We went on foot, although my father did own a car. In our area we saw few civilians, except for the women of the Vissers Dijk mingling with the soldiers and watching the fire. On several occasions we were stopped by Dutch soldiers and searched.

My parents had decided to go to friends of ours, the Feketes, an old Hungarian couple who lived in another suburb. We walked several kilometers to that suburb and I will never forget the contrast that we found there. It was as though the war did not exist; children were playing in the streets, shops were open and people seemed to be going about their normal affairs. I had the impression that our friends did not believe us when we told them of the situation that we had just left behind.

This experience made a lasting impression on me. In later years when we used to hear of trouble spots around the world close to where friends and relatives lived I never panicked, because I remembered that one could have a war in one suburb and not even know about it in the next.

During the following days, other refugees came to stay at the Feketes. We slept on couches, in armchairs and on the floor. Apparently there was no problem in obtaining food.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of May, the fifth day of the war and our third day at the Feketes, I was in the basement chopping firewood. Suddenly I became aware of whistling sounds and distant explosions. They did not perturb me and I carried on with my work, but after a while my father called me to join the others who were standing in the passage for safety. In a bombardment, the smaller the room, the stronger the structure. Later on I would see many houses that had been demolished in

bombardments, with only the toilet remaining intact, sometimes stuck several floors up and projecting from a remaining wall.

Only the elderly Feketes and my family remained. After the bombing we went out into the street and noticed that a large part of the town was in flames with the wind blowing the fire steadily towards us. The block of houses where we stayed had an overhead railway line between us and the fire and a stream on the other side. A fire engine was positioned there and pumping water from the stream for the fire hoses. The fire on a broad front was now approaching us rapidly. I saw German soldiers on the railway line, the first that I had seen. I assume that they were there to extinguish any fire that might threaten the railway.

We now began to evacuate our possessions, piling them in a heap on the island in front of the house. Irene, who was only four years old, was left sitting on top of those belongings. Eventually a Dutch couple approached her and asked her where her parents were. They then gave my father their address and told him that their house, which was on the other side of the stream, would be available to us should we need it. I walked in the street and watched the fire approach. House after house would burst into flame. A chemist shop caught fire and in a fierce blaze it burnt to the ground in about fifteen minutes.

It was already dark when my parents decided to avail themselves of the kind invitation of refuge that they had received. There was no point in spending the night on the street, and to stay in the house was too dangerous. The Feketes elected to remain. So once again we picked up our belongings and began walking.

Upon arrival at our rescuers' house we were taken up to the attic where there were several bedrooms. On our way up we noticed a large picture of Hitler on the wall. These people were Nazis. My father immediately told the proprietor that we were Jews. He said that he had realized this by now, although Irene's and my father's Aryan looks had deceived him. He told my father that we were welcome to stay, and that he had once been in a similar predicament to ours. This had made him resolve to repay the debt should the opportunity arise. Before going to sleep I happened to glance out of the attic window and saw a sight which I shall never forget. The whole city from horizon to horizon was in flame.

The following morning we awoke to find that there was no running water. Our hostess brought my mother Eau de Cologne to wash with. My father and I then left to see what had become of the Feketes. Luckily the block in which they lived had been spared, as the fire had not been able to cross the railway line, or if it had, the firemen had been able to control it. My father and I then began a nightmare journey through the smouldering streets. I don't remember him saying much, but his agitation showed in the way that he would sometimes roughly lift me up by my arm to carry me bodily over heaps of broken glass.

We could not have gone very far from the Fekete's house when a van drew up alongside us. It was the delivery van belonging to my father's uncle, Baczi, which, with my cousin Theo and a driver, had been sent from The Hague to try

and find us. They had first tried to reach our house on the North Blaak, without being able to do so, and had been told that nothing remained of that suburb. Then they tried the Feketes and eventually, after driving to and fro, found us. To me it seemed like a miracle, a chariot sent from heaven. And so the end of that day saw us all safely with my aunt Lenke in The Hague, all unharmed albeit shocked, ruined and dispossessed.

### **LIFE IN A COUNTRY AT WAR.**

We lived with my aunt Lenke for about three months, while my father tried to re-establish himself. Everything had to be replaced: the home, furniture, and the business. During this period I went to school in The Hague. Eventually we returned to Rotterdam and to our new house in the Claes de Vrieselaan. It was a small three-roomed house, 1 bedroom, dining room and a lounge that my father turned into his shop. The shop had large display windows and served as my bedroom at night. My father used to have two shop assistants, one called Jan Speelman. Jan had been caught in the streets during the bombardment, and although he suffered no visible injury, his legs remained partially paralyzed. In any case the shop was now so small that my father could manage it by himself.

I returned to my old primary school. It was situated in the centre of the town, had been bombed and the top stories burnt out. It was the only usable building for kilometers around, other than the Townhall and the hospital. Every other building was a shell, burnt out, and blasted.

If you should think that this was a most depressing place to re-establish a school, you would be mistaken. We children had a glorious time. The ruins became our castles, and the enemy, children from other schools. Our weapons, the stones that were lying in heaps everywhere. We could not wait for school to end, so that with our leather satchels over our arms as shields we could do battle with other children. We would confront each other on any cleared plot and throw stones. Alternatively we would occupy one ruin and beat back any boys that tried to dislodge us by throwing stones and dropping the occasional boulder on them. The following day the roles would be reversed. We would go looking for an occupied "castle", bombard it with stones and then storm it.

Obviously children were hurt. My friend Loekie van Veen was hit by a stone just below his eye. We took him to the nearby hospital where he was duly admitted and for some unknown reason his shoes were given to us by a nurse. So his best friend Don volunteered to take the shoes to his mother. The houses in Loekie's part of the world were also long and narrow, with one endless staircase connecting all the different floors. I rang the bell and Loekie's mother, who lived on the top floor, pulled the string that was connected to the lock. I stood in the doorway and she stood five floors above me looking down the uninterrupted staircase. "Loekie is in hospital and I have brought his shoes back", I said, and then I saw this woman start swaying at the top of that staircase.

In due course Loekie returned to school with a magnificent red scar below his eye. He was promptly paraded in all the schools in the neighbourhood to

demonstrate the evils of throwing stones at people. One week later Loekie happily joined our stone throwing expeditions again.

One day I left school a bit later than usual, only to come across a pitiful sight. A boy wearing spectacles, of small stature and my age, was cowering against a wall while my classmates threw stones at him. I asked for the reason and was told that this boy was Italian and that his father was one of the foremost Nazis in Rotterdam. I knew that when I was with this boy the others would leave him alone, so from that day he would wait for me and I would walk him home. I was not the biggest boy in the class, but I had many friends and the boys respected me. This boy, Pietro, was intelligent, loyal to his parents, and yet apologetic for their beliefs. We would sit on the doorstep of his home and converse. He would tell me that he regretted not being able to invite me in, as his parents did not approve of Jews, even 10-year old ones. I never heard an anti-Semitic remark from him. Years later I would meet him again under very different circumstances.

Rotterdam at that time was the biggest port in Europe, and air raids were the main events in our lives. The RAF bombed the harbour facilities with its docks and oil tank farms almost nightly. At the end of the Claes de Vrieselaan stood a skyscraper which housed the electricity and, I think, the telephone communications network for the whole city. Our house was about three blocks away from this complex, which put us in the target area. The trouble was that despite weekly and sometimes nightly air raids this complex was never hit, but everything around it was.

How can I describe the terror of the air raids to you? One would look at the full moon or its combination with fresh snow, lighting up the night until you could read by it. Then people would whisper: "Tonight they will come." First one would see the searchlights stabbing the night sky with their ghostly beams. Then the wailing of the air raid sirens would be heard, followed by the roaring of anti-aircraft fire. Soon the distant throbbing hum of the bombers would come closer and closer, accompanied by the shrill whistling and explosions of bombs. The house would shake and creak and I would join the silent figures of my parents in the bedroom. There was no panic, no hugs or words of comfort - what was there to say? We would just sit and await our fate.

I remember one night when the bombers sounded as though they were right overhead. The bombs were falling so close that we would not even hear their whistle, just the devastating explosions. My six-year old sister lay asleep in her bed and there was talk of waking her in case we had to leave the house. We could hear the crash of collapsing buildings, the display windows in the shop blew out, cutting my bed into shreds. The leaded glass in an interleading door buckled, the grate fell out of the fireplace and the pictures dropped from the walls. And all this time the child slept.

Daylight would bring relief, that is until the American Superfortresses took over in 1942. I would rush outside to survey the damage, check to see if my friends were all right, and then start searching for the shrapnel from the anti-aircraft

shells. Collecting shrapnel was on a par with postage stamps. To us they were things of beauty; they were rare, could be exchanged and had a value, especially if the serial numbers and the screw threads were still intact.

In front of our house was an air raid shelter, which we never used unless caught out in the open. I awoke one morning to find a huge gaping hole in the street on the far side of the shelter, obviously a bomb crater. I happily jumped into it, hoping to find bomb splinters and when this proved in vain, I resumed my usual rounds of checking up on my friends and neighbours. Returning about an hour later, I found the whole area cordoned off. I asked for the reason and was told: "You see that hole in the street over there? There are unexploded chain bombs lying in it". (Chain bombs were several bombs chained together to create a greater impact.) So the Krausz's packed up once more and went to Auntie Lenke in The Hague for three weeks until those bombs were finally defused.

It was now 1941. We had been under German occupation for a year and the Jews had not been touched. In Eastern Europe the story had been very different: in Poland the persecution commenced with the entry of German troops. In Lithuania, Croatia and Rumania the population did not even wait for the Germans to encourage them: The murders, rape and plunder began immediately. Latvia, Lithuania and Russia were not too different: the German Einsatzgruppen moved in right behind the advancing Wehrmacht to commit their atrocities.

But that was in Eastern Europe, with its age-old history of anti-Semitism, actively encouraged by government and church. Holland had no official policy of discrimination against Jews. Once a year the Royal Family would attend a synagogue service, so I had been told, and Jews occupied high positions in the army and the government service. Besides, from the German point of view, the Dutch were of Germanic stock and should therefore be encouraged slowly to accept the Nazi ideology rather than be alienated with brutal measures.

So for a year we were left in peace. Meanwhile the German propaganda machine was hard at work. In the newspapers, on the radio, in all the cinemas, through the placards on the walls, the Dutch population was being re-educated, especially as far as Jews were concerned. When the Nuremberg laws were promulgated in Holland, the Dutch population did not read of it in their newspapers; every Jewish family received its own paper with the latest prohibitions. The Dutch population did not have to know everything that was happening to us.

This propaganda was horribly effective. My father, who looked Aryan and did not have to wear the Yellow Star because of his Hungarian nationality, used to go to see the German anti-Semitic films. He would tell us that if he had not been Jewish himself, he would have become an anti-Semite. The placards on the walls showed in lurid detail repulsive Jewish caricatures engaged in acts of murder and robbery against innocent and pure-looking Aryan men, women and

children. The arrest of Jewish criminals was trumpeted through the press and exaggerated out of all proportion.

And so the Jews were forced to wear the Yellow Star whenever they appeared in public. Parents and children were prohibited from entering any public place of entertainment. Jewish children could no longer go to playgrounds, swimming pools, cinemas or theatres and we children were taken out of our schools and made to attend special schools for Jews only. Not only were we stigmatized through our yellow stars, but we ourselves began to feel different and abhorrent. Our introduction to the new German "Kultur" was through the persecution of children.

Friends of my parents came to our house telling how they had been kicked out of their businesses and jobs. People began to disappear. Lists were published in the Jewish press of age categories of young men and women who had to report for forced labour. My cousin Theo, son of Lenke and Baczi, was sent to one of these labour camps from where he eventually went to Auschwitz and we never saw him again. After the war we heard that his hand had become infected, so that he was unable to hold a spade. A course of sulfa drugs or in today's age, antibiotics, would have cured him; instead he was gassed.

We Hungarians were exempt from these regulations. Hungary was an ally of Germany and insisted at that time that her Jewish nationals be treated accordingly. (Most of my father's family had taken out Dutch citizenship, and this seemingly harmless act would eventually cost them their lives.)

Despite our exemption, the prevailing atmosphere was one of fear and despair. Life became violent. The Dutch Nazis in their black uniforms used to march in the streets armed with truncheons. The locals would taunt and insult them and fights used to break out. This happened several times right in front of our house. To a child who is unused to physical violence seeing adults being beaten bloody right on one's own doorstep was a fearsome sight. The prevailing mood is best described by the fact that we had rucksacks made for each of us and kept them, plus several suitcases, packed just in case. And that was while being exempt Hungarians; how the Dutch Jews felt can only be imagined.

There was resistance of sorts. My father would go out at night with friends and sabotage German army directional signs. Many of his clients were German army personnel and my father spoke fluent German. He did not look Jewish and I must assume that we did not have a "Mezuzah" on our front doorpost.

One day the Gestapo came to him and asked to see his ledger. They did not know that he was Jewish. When he asked them for an explanation they told him that all Jews had to declare their income. If a Jew bought Persian carpets and yet declared a low income then he was obviously lying. My father asked how one could tell whether a person's name was Jewish, as many Dutch Jews had Dutch names. "We'll know!" was the answer, and to my father's surprise these Gestapo agents were able to identify the majority of the Jewish customers. My father spent the rest of the day phoning and warning these people.

I, of course, also joined in the fight against Hitler. During the winter we would throw snowballs at German soldiers. I remember one chasing me until I managed to duck into a department store and get lost in the crowd. I would also try and tear or damage the horrible anti-Semitic posters on the walls. Once I was duly occupied when I felt that something was wrong. I turned around to see a fat individual with a Hitler moustache, a cigar and a swastika lapel button advancing on me. I managed to escape. About six months later we all went on holiday to a place near the German border. Who should share our compartment but this same man with his swastika badge. Luckily he did not recognize me, but my journey was far from pleasant. His face I remember to this day.

Thereafter I developed a technique of standing with my back to a poster and scrape away at it behind me with a knife. Thus I could watch out for anybody hostile.

By now I had also been removed to a Jewish school, despite my Hungarian nationality. This was a blow, for I had attended my previous school for about five years and most of my friends were there.

I spent about a year at that Jewish school, but do not think that I learned much. The poor Jewish teachers were continually being changed as one or the other would disappear. They taught under terrible tension, and I have seen a teacher so enraged that he grabbed a pupil and proceeded to bang his head against a wall.

One Jewish holiday the school was closed and I took my bicycle and paid a visit to my old school. My erstwhile classmates were pleased to see me and asked where I had been. I explained the circumstances, which my old friends refused to accept. They then took me to the headmaster in order to find out whether I spoke the truth. The headmaster confirmed what I had said, but assured me and those Christian boys that as soon as the war was over he would be only too glad to welcome me back. So much for anti-Semitism in Rotterdam.

### **WESTERBORK**

On the 16<sup>th</sup> September 1942, we were all having dinner, when suddenly a window was smashed at the back of the house. A Dutch policeman put his hand through the broken window, opened the backdoor and marched into the house. He curtly ordered my father to open the front door to his German compatriot and a soldier came in. They gave us fifteen minutes to pack and accompany them. Despite our shock and consternation this was not difficult as our rucksacks and suitcases were packed already. We were marched across the river to the other side of Rotterdam, where we joined a large group of people in a warehouse and spent the night sleeping on the floor. The following morning we were put onto a passenger train and taken to the Westerbork transit camp in Holland on the heath near the German border.

Westerbork was not a concentration camp, if compared to the ones we were to experience later. There were no executions, or uniformed thugs lumbering

around beating people, cursing and kicking them. There was hunger, but no one died of it. We were housed in barracks with three-tier beds spaced in two's with a table and two benches in between. The barracks did not leak and were heated with stoves. Men slept in one half of the barrack, women and children in the other, so that families could see one another every day. There was a wire fence around the camp, but it was not electrified and there were no watchtowers. The camp had an excellent hospital, an orchestra, a theatre, all of top quality as they were staffed by the foremost Jewish doctors, musicians and actors in Holland. The camp commander and some of his staff were SS, otherwise it was guarded by Dutch Military police, who at a later stage were replaced by Dutch Waffen SS. We were allowed to wear our own clothes. One could even get a milk ration for babies.

The whole camp was administered by German Jewish refugees, who had very little sympathy for us. We were to find out that the camp predated the war, having been established by the Dutch government to house these refugees who, I assume, had left Germany without any means of support, passports or visas and had no contacts in Holland. These refugees regarded their having been housed in such a camp as a disgrace, both on the part of the Dutch government and the Jews of Holland who had not seen to it that the Jewish communities in the cities of Holland absorbed them.

The inhabitants were employed in and around the camp. Although food was restricted, these were not the starvation rations of a concentration camp, nor was the work such that, combined with totally inadequate rations it could amount to a death sentence. We children went to school, and occasionally sent out to help with the harvest on the surrounding farms or cleaning barracks. My mother worked at her profession of English teacher while my father was a hospital orderly as far as I remember.

Many of the German refugees were religious and they had a well-organized Zionist youth movement in the camp. It was there that I first participated in an Oneg Shabbath, the ceremonial celebration of the Sabbath with song, dance and cultural activities. The language was German; we went to German classes at school, all of which was to stand me in good stead later.

Nine months after arriving in Westerbork I "celebrated" my Bar Mitzvah, my Jewish confirmation. In preparation thereof my parents arranged for a Hebrew teacher, Mr. Finkel, to teach me my portion of the Torah. Normally speaking, the preparation for a Bar Mitzvah ceremony would involve a certain amount of study of our religion, customs as well as scripture, but because of the circumstances pertaining to inmates of that camp it was decided to prepare me in as short a time as possible. The aforementioned circumstances I will come to later.

Mr. Finkel was a good teacher and a fine, impressive man. I came strongly under his religious influence and became friendly with his son and his circle of very religious boys. It was through them that I first experienced the wonder and beauty of the Sabbath when properly kept, as well as the fervour and devotion

that can be put into prayer. In due course my Bar Mitzvah was held in a tent and my father managed to obtain tallis, tefillin (prayer shawl and phylacteries) and even a silver watch for me. I am afraid that there could not be a reception.

One Sabbath I was standing outside our barrack together with young Finkel and his friends. There was a stove in the entrance and a woman came and placed a pot of milk thereon. Milk was only obtainable for babies, and once that daily ration had been drawn it could not be replaced. Having put that milk on the stove, the woman went back into the barrack. I noticed that the milk was going to boil over and so removed the pot from the fire.

CHILLUL SHABBAT!! - Desecration of the Sabbath! One may not cook, touch or light a fire on the Sabbath! The outcry from my new friends was harsh; they called their fathers, tall men dressed in black with black hats and long beards, and their condemnation was even stronger. They produced the Bible and showed me where it was written that desecration of the Sabbath was punishable by death! That sounded daft to me and I insisted that they accompany me to my teacher, Mr. Finkel. He, upon hearing the story from the boys and the adults, had to agree that this was a case of Chillul Shabbat, but I could see from his face that he was not particularly happy to judge in this matter. I pointed out that the milk was irreplaceable, only to be told that that was not my responsibility, but that of the mother. I had virtually signed my own death warrant. The sad and ironic side to this story is that with the exception of the Finkel family, I am probably the only one left alive of all those people.

I must mention the superb entertainment in Westerbork. Some of the finest actors, musicians and cabaret artists of both Holland and Germany were Jews, and sooner or later the Dutch ones, and those of Germany, who had sought refuge in Holland, came to the camp. I think that my first introduction to classical music stems from that time, while the cabaret and both opera and Yiddish vocalists were unforgettable.

We were allowed to receive parcels. My father had left money with friends and relations to provide for this contingency, and as the food was insufficient, the arrival of a parcel was most welcome. But there were those who did not receive anything and were as hungry as we were. Consequently most of the parcels were plundered, but at least the thieves often had a sense of humour. I remember our receiving an apple crate with one apple inside. Another time the box was empty except for what looked like a very moldy loaf of bread. My mother sadly gave me the task of throwing this loaf out, but on the way to the dustbins it struck me that this loaf felt rather heavy. So back I went for a knife, only to discover that I held a complete round cheese in my hands. I also remember our receiving a few wooden boxes of sardines from Portugal sent by my mother's English family through the Red Cross. For normal, well-fed people this won't sound like a big deal, but believe me, if it had not been, I would not have remembered it after all these years.

So what kind of a camp was this? We were told that our destination was labour camps in Poland where families would be together, the work hard, but the rations adequate to perform that work. In retrospect we now know that these benevolent conditions were part of a diabolical plan. Westerbork existed to send the Jews of Holland to the gas chambers. Provided that it served its primary function of railing 1,000 Jews every week to places such as Auschwitz or Sobibor, the SS in charge of the camp could allow the inmates to do what they wished. The more successful they were in dispelling any misgivings of the inmates as to their fate, the easier it would be for all concerned.

But were we completely stupid? Surely the fact that babies and aged people were being sent to these so-called "Labour Camps" must have set the alarm bells ringing? I believe that there were several factors at work in dispelling our doubts:

A). The Jews were a sane people and would not have readily accepted information that did not make sense. Had some one informed us of the real purpose of Auschwitz, we would not have believed it. Why should we have believed something that even today with the wisdom of hindsight appears utterly insane?

Germany had mobilized millions of men for its war effort. These men had been taken from the farms, the factories and from the commercial sector. They had been employed, and others would be needed to replace them. We saw ourselves selected for that role, the Geneva Convention governing the treatment of civilians and prisoners-of-war notwithstanding.

That situation was not peculiar to Nazi Germany. In England the women were recruited during the war to bring in the harvest and became known as the Land Girls. After Pearl Harbour, the women of the USA went into the factories and produced the aircraft.

B). Even if we became aware that we were being duped, there was not much that we could do about it. Breaking out of the camp would have been easy, but then what? There were thousands of men, women and children there. To get back to their places of origin they would have needed travel documents and money; to obtain food they would need ration cards. A break-out would have caused a mass mobilization of the German forces, which had been known to react with the utmost savagery. Westerbork was situated on a heath. Escaping was not a matter of quickly popping next door to the neighbours. The casualty rate might well have been horrendous and for what? A highly unlikely rumour?

In view of the above, those who had knowledge denied to others may have felt that it was better not to cause alarm among thousands of defenseless people and give the highly cultured, civilized Germans the benefit of the doubt.

I have carefully arranged all the fairly innocuous experiences of Westerbork together. We will now come to the real purpose of that camp, starting with a glimpse into the future.

For several weeks I had the job of working in an empty barrack as floor washer and general factotum. The barrack leader was a kindly German Jewish lady, who made sure that I did not lack food. One day a transport arrived from a small Dutch concentration camp called Ellekom, which had been a training camp for the Dutch SS. The inmates, all youngish men, had been brutalized, starved and were skeletal, almost too weak to stand. I was horrified, although such a spectacle was to become very familiar to me.

The barrack leader managed to obtain cakes for these men, something that I had never seen in Westerbork. She then decided that I was the most suitable person to distribute those cakes, little realizing what would happen. So all of thirteen years old, I took my box of cakes and stepped into that barrack.

The men saw me coming: they all slowly rose and came towards me, a mass of skeletons with open mouths, staring hollow eyes and their pathetic hands outstretched. They did not rush me, they did not attack me or try to take my box from me - I don't think that they had the strength. I tried to satisfy them as best I could, but the impact was such that I have never during all these years been able to speak or write about it without weeping or feeling terribly sad. They were put on the next transport to Auschwitz.

Westerbork was a transit camp. Its purpose was to rail 1000 Jews a week to the Death Camps in Eastern Europe. Their destination was no secret - boldly displayed on the trains were the names Sobibor or Oswiecim or sometimes its German equivalent, Auschwitz. Where these places were or what they stood for nobody seemed to know. All that we knew for certain was that 1000 men, women and children were sent there every week and that they never came back. No letter was ever received from there, no message delivered.

And so there was a terrible fear of those transports, the fear of the unknown. Nobody wanted to be sent there, and if you were, then you tried your utmost to be exempted. But was this possible? We shall soon see.

Every Tuesday morning at 1.00 am, the lights would be turned on in our barrack and the barrack leader would come in with a list. In a harsh, grating voice, perhaps to hide his emotion, he would read out names from that list, names of the people in his barrack who were being sent to the East that day. He would be listened to in total silence, except that as a name was called out you would sometimes hear a cry or a sob. The people so listed would have to leave on the train by eleven o'clock that morning.

So what did people do when their names were called out? Some were just stunned, staring in front of them, not moving. Some were crying. Mothers got up, woke their children and dressed them, prepared them for the journey and tried to find food. There were no shops in Westerbork and the only food on the train was what one could bring oneself.

They did not have many belongings; their remaining time would be spent writing a letter, saying goodbye, and sometimes just quietly weeping. The vultures

would arrive; people who would go from person to person, inspect his or her belongings and then say: "You don't really need this, do you?"

But for a very few there was something that could be tried. The Germans wanted us to believe that we were being sent to a labour camp. If you were sick then you could not work, and Westerbork had an outstanding hospital. My father and some of his brothers suffered from stomach complaints, perhaps ulcers, perhaps gallstones. Three weeks after our arrival at the camp we were put on the list. My father managed to have himself admitted to the hospital for treatment. My mother, Irene and I were consequently exempted too.

There was one snag to these exemptions: one thousand people had to leave on the train that morning. If your name was removed from the list, then somebody else replaced you. For that reason we never went near the train, not even to say goodbye, for if at the last moment it was found that the tally was short, then the Jewish camp police would grab anybody, young or old, sick or otherwise and shove him or her on that train. Their- and their family's exemption from the transports depended on it.

A while later we found ourselves in the same quandary. This time the hospital treatment could not be tried, it had been used already. But Jews ran the complete administration of the camp. So my father contacted a relation of his at the hospital, a Dr. Haas, and they both spent the night going from office to office, clerk to clerk, to try and get our names removed from the list. On a "Day of Transport," as we called Tuesdays, the administration would work throughout the night. Dr. Haas was not on the list – he was merely doing my father a favour. By 9.00 o'clock that morning, eight hours later, they finally succeeded, whereupon my father returned to our barrack to tell my mother that she could relax. Dr. Haas's nightshift at the hospital ended at 7.00 a.m. so he went to his barrack.

But when Dr. Haas arrived at his barrack, he found that in the meantime his name and that of his wife and baby had been listed, probably by the same clerk that removed our names. That man had been obliged to replace us with another four people. The train was leaving in two hours time, and by now it was too late to attempt a rescue. This left us in the ironic and peculiar situation where we had to go and say goodbye to Dr. Haas, without whom this story would not have been written. I shall never forget the look of despair on that man's face. We never saw him or his wife and baby again.

I last saw my father when I was thirteen years old, and so cannot say that I knew him well. I am certain, however, that he had no intention of sending anyone else to these places with the strange names, Auschwitz, Sobibor. I am also sure that he must have felt that his first duty was to his wife and children.

Not long after that, all Hungarian Jews were exempted from transport, and we did not have to worry about lists.

We had been in Westerbork about one year when my father took ill again. I think that he had gall stones or ulcers. In any case it was felt that the camp hospital

was not equipped to handle such cases, and my father and his brother Sanyi, who had a similar complaint, were sent to a civilian hospital in the town of Groningen to be operated on and whence they eventually returned.

This was not my father's first venture outside the camp. Some time prior to this he had been allowed to leave and go to Rotterdam in order to settle his affairs. His friend van Hulten had begged him not to return to Westerbork and had promised him that he could be hidden. But my father well knew the conditions for being allowed leave from Westerbork: unless he returned by a certain date his wife and children would be put on the next train to Auschwitz.

These episodes also illustrate the difference between Westerbork and a concentration camp, where such granting of leave would have been unheard of. They also served to lull any suspicions that we may have had as to our fate.

There were other lists as well in Westerbork. From time to time word would spread that the Germans were going to exchange Jews for German nationals held by the Allies and that a list of names was being prepared. Such a list would only be for people who had a lot of money to spend or were famous and influential. The list would be drawn up, people would part with a fortune, some Germans and their collaborators would become very rich, and some months later all the people on that list would be put on transport, usually to a concentration camp.

The trains were not only there to take Jews away to unknown destinations. There were also trains I gladly went to meet; trains bringing friends and family to Westerbork. Little did I realize the full implication of what being sent to Westerbork meant. I remember the arrival of my uncle, Pityu, one of my favourites, and how happy I was to go and report this to my parents. They were less joyful; Pityu had been one of those who sent us food parcels.

### **RAVENSBRUCK**

In February 1944, after we had been in Westerbork for nearly a year and a half, the Hungarians were placed on transport. First the men were sent to Buchenwald concentration camp in Germany. There were no scenes, I saw no tears. I don't think that any of us realized that this was a final farewell. What did we know of concentration camps, who in his worst nightmares dreamt that there could be a 'final solution'?

Yet the parting was a deeply felt occasion. I cannot speak for my mother, only she will know what she must have felt. Irene was eight years old; does she even remember the event? I had not yet had the opportunity to form a close relationship with my father, but I had a strong desire to give him something of mine, something that would indicate to him that I loved him. So I took my recently acquired silver Bar Mitzvah watch and slipped it into the pocket of his overcoat when he was not looking. It was only when I was an adult that I began to realize the emotional impact that the discovery of the watch must have had on my

father. Did he understand what this gesture was meant to convey? Did he perhaps think that I was rejecting his gift?

Several days later the Hungarian women and children were put on a passenger train and taken to a concentration camp called Ravensbruck, 80 km to the north of Berlin. The fact that we traveled by passenger train rather than the usual cattle trucks, led us to believe that perhaps we were still privileged. The adults amongst us may have read or heard about such camps; they could never have imagined the reality. 92,000 women and thousands of men died in Ravensbruck, i.e. three out of every four people, and that is without there being a gas chamber, at least not while I was there.

It has been said that the death of one person is a tragedy; the death of thousands is a statistic. We cannot comprehend the enormity of such suffering. When speaking to children I tell them that if I were to describe the death of one person in emotional terms, they might well weep. But I am not speaking of one person only – I am speaking of millions.

Our journey was fairly uneventful. I remember a young soldier with a sub machinegun coming into our compartment and telling us that he and his "kameraden" were there to shoot us if we tried to escape. I also remember thinking how stupid it was to say this to a group of women and children, of which the youngest were babies and the oldest child thirteen. We traveled via the blacked out city of Bremen and were left in our train on the station while an air raid was in progress.

Of our arrival in Ravensbruck I don't recollect much, except that all the adults had their civilian clothes taken from them and were given the now notorious grey and blue striped concentration camp uniforms. Luckily there were no uniforms small enough for us children, so we were left with all our civilian clothes. This was to play an important role in our and our parents' survival, because winter temperatures in Ravensbruck were 28 degrees below zero, and without our woolen jerseys and Jaeger underwear, we and our mothers would have experienced the extremes of exposure that we were to see the other inmates suffer. But more of that later.

We were each given a piece of cloth with a number on it to sew onto our clothes. With this number we lost our identity as individuals. Henceforth we would be called or referred to by number only. If someone in authority wished to report you for punishment, all they had to do was take down your number. And yet the number could not completely block out your identity. A low number meant that you had been there for some time and could well have reached a position of authority or influence. Those with the records or the memory to do so would be able to tell from your number on which transport you had arrived and thus guess at your background.

For further identification you were given a coloured triangle or a Star of David. One's nationality was printed on the triangle, UNG for Ungar (Hungarian), SU for

Soviet Union and so forth. The colour of that bit of cloth denoted the reason that you had been sent to a concentration camp. Red meant political, either Communist or resistance, Green was criminal, Pink homosexual, Black antisocial (usually prostitute), Mauve Jehovah's Witness, a Red triangle crossed with a yellow one to create a Star of David was the worst category of all: Jewish.

Our heads were examined for vermin, and great was the consternation and shame when one of our women was found to have lice and had all her hair shaved off. She literally could not hold her head up after this. We were sent to Barrack 23. Why should I mention this? Because Barrack 23 had a Czech barrack leader, who was "political", i.e. a communist and not a German criminal or prostitute who might have made very short shrift of us.

Let me describe our barrack to you. It was made of wood with double walls and fiber glass wool in between for insulation. There were cold water washing facilities, but no baths or showers. There were toilets. One ate in a dining hall at wooden tables and benches and if you were lucky you found a three-legged stool to sit on. We ate from chipped enamel bowls and had spoons. The sleeping quarters consisted of wooden three-tier beds, about 60 cm wide, with straw mattresses and a straw pillow; each inmate was given a very poor quality blanket. The mattresses were lice ridden. We children slept five to two beds.

We were woken at half past three in the morning in summer and an hour later in winter. One was given half an hour to prepare oneself for "Appel". Appel was the roll call at which everyone had to appear to be counted in order to ensure that no one had escaped. If a person was missing then the whole camp had to stand there until the culprit was either found or apprehended.

Let me dwell a little on the Appel. The uniforms that the women wore were made of cotton or a mixture thereof with artificial fiber. One could get splinters from it. They had no hats, no scarves or warm underwear, no jerseys, no gloves. They wore wooden sandals on their feet and I am not sure whether they wore stockings or not. Most of our women had no overcoats.

At a temperature of 28 degrees below zero one covers one's mouth and nostrils with a cloth or scarf, as breathing becomes painful. We had no cloths or scarves. I have seen grown men cry from the cold during Appel. These poor, shivering women used to huddle together like sheep in order to benefit from each other's body warmth. They were not allowed to bring their blankets. Appel never took less than one and a half hours. People used to collapse and die during Appel.

When Appel was over, every one was marched back to the barrack. We children, however, used to run on ahead in order to secure one of the scarce stools for our mothers. There were benches, but these would be crowded and difficult to get to. If our mothers arrived early, good and well. If not there would

be stand-up fights for those stools after people had been standing for one and a half hours. The Polish women used to try and take our stools, cursing us children the while as "Zhid Pshakrev" – accursed Jew. I once hit one of these women over the head with such a stool after she tried to take it away from me.

Breakfast consisted of a mug of black liquid, coffee it wasn't, and a slice of bread about four inches (10cm) square and one inch (2.4cm) thick. I called it bread, but it was said to consist partly of sawdust. It was said to weigh about 180 grammes. With it one received a small piece of margarine, plus either jam, or a thin slice of sausage or cheese. Cheese? "Stink cheese" every one used to call it because of the smell.

That piece of bread had to last one the whole day; there was no lunch. This situation used to lead to weighty decisions: "Do I eat all of my bread now and starve in the afternoon, or do I save some for later and run the risk that somebody will rob me of it?" I was a child and might not have been able to defend my slice. I used to eat it immediately.

After breakfast the women were marched off to do physically heavy labour. They dug trenches, they pulled enormous concrete rollers to make roads, all the while being beaten, cursed and humiliated if the Capo (prisoner overseer) or guard was dissatisfied with their progress; some were lucky and worked in nearby factories. In the evening upon their return to the camp they would be counted again, and then it was time for the evening meal.

The food would arrive in 72 liter canisters which were each dragged from the kitchen by eight women, one woman on each side to lift the thing and three on each side to pull her along. They would lift that extremely heavy weight, run a short distance with it and then put it down panting in order to rest.

Dinner consisted of one liter of boiled water with pieces of Swedish turnip in it. No meat, no potato, no fat, and the turnip was part of an enormous thing normally fed to cattle called a "Shteckrube" in German. Very good for cattle, but then so is grass. Actually, if one got any turnip one was lucky, because the practice was to let the canister stand for a while so that its vegetable contents could settle at the bottom. It was then opened and without stirring, the liquid would be ladled off the top of the canister, thus leaving the vegetables at the bottom for the barrack leader and her cronies. After a while we became wise, and starving or not, we would try to make sure that we were not amongst the first 50 people when a fresh canister was opened, because then you got boiled water. Each person received one liter of this 'soup'. Can you see now why the acquisition of a decent barrack leader was so important? Do you also now realize how 92,000 women and thousands of men came to perish in Ravensbruck?

The barrack leader had life and death in her hands and there was no appeal. He or she was not there to look after you. She was not responsible for your survival, and if you didn't, no questions would be asked. If he or she did not like your religion, nationality, the reason that put you in the camp (political, criminal, Jewish, etc.) or even just the look of you she could beat you until you succumbed. Some of my most vivid recollections of that place are the sight and sound of women screaming as they were beaten with sticks. If your bed was not made absolutely straight and smooth you were beaten, if you talked after lights out you were beaten. If you had dysentery and could not get to the toilet in time you were beaten. Even if you got there in time your troubles weren't over, because you were likely to find a woman there who was responsible for toilets, and unless you bribed her with food, she would assign you to a toilet where you had to wade to get to your destination.

Eventually one became so weak that one would go down with one of the many illnesses prevalent in the camp: Typhus, tuberculosis, dysentery, 'camp fever'. I had camp fever twice; it was never diagnosed and I was hospitalized for about a week in Westerbork and three weeks in Ravensbruck with it.

The hospital, known as the Revier, deserves a paragraph to itself. First of all you only went there as an absolutely last resort, in fact when they had to carry you there. I was taken there when I developed a very high fever and could neither eat nor walk. How high a fever? My temperature was never taken, but I was aware that I was very sick. Hospital treatment consisted of not having to work, being given a two-tiered instead of a three-tiered bed and nothing else. During the three weeks that I was there I saw SS doctors walk around in their riding breeches and black jackboots, but they never saw me. Not even a nurse came near me. But then how did I get my food? Simple, I didn't eat, only drank water except after I started recovering. I lay in my top bunk with high fever and diarrhea and would drag myself along the wall to the toilet. There I would suspend myself by my hands from a sling that I had made and wound through the handle of the door. One could not sit on that toilet, such was its filthy state, and then I would drag myself to my ward again and somehow get back into my top bunk.

After some time I was transferred from the general ward to a smaller one with only two double tiered beds in it. Once again I was in the top bunk; a young woman who lay perfectly still and naked on her bed and was dying, occupied the one below me. I suspect that other inmates had stripped her of all her clothes. Next to her sat a few women chatting and laughing. The moment that the poor soul on the bed breathed her last, these women ran out of the room screaming, leaving me with the body. It was the first time that I had witnessed a death, let alone having been left alone with a corpse at the age of 13. I have never known of any reason to fear a corpse and found the behaviour of the women inexplicable. People whom I knew were brought in unconscious. They were

placed on the beds and promptly had all their possessions stolen. If they had food with them, which a new arrival to the camp might have, the nurses would sit down next to the unconscious owner and have a feast.

One day, when my fever had abated, I saw a woman scrubbing the floor and she told me that she had suffered my symptoms. I asked her how she was cured and she told me that she had doctored herself with a medication called Tanalbin. I asked her to get me some, and that eventually cured my diarrhea.

One avoided the Revier because that place was not there to cure you. From time to time a selection was held and people who did not show signs of imminent recovery would either be given a lethal injection or sent on a transport never to return. When it became obvious that I might have to go to the Revier, influential friends of my mother first made enquiries to find out whether a selection was anticipated. They then monitored my stay for the same reason. One of our group, a child of about six or seven, caught typhus and was sent to the hospital. Although still sick she was smuggled out through a window when it became apparent that a selection would be held.

Considering these circumstances, the inmates of the Revier must have lived in abject misery, in fear and tension and under conditions of utter degradation. I, however, was far too sick to experience most of these emotions. My main recollections are of being ill and the horror of the toilets.

When eventually I left the Revier and walked back into my barrack, the first member of our group of Hungarians who saw me covered her mouth and screamed. I had become emaciated, a walking skeleton, a "Muselman".

What did we children do during the day? We were warned to keep out of sight of the area where the Commandant and his staff could see us. Not that he was unaware of our existence - every roll call would have reminded him. We were told to stay in a far corner of the camp. I remember some of the routines that we developed for our own safety. One was a popular tune that would only be sung when there was danger and every one had to be warned. This could happen when a person known to be an informer started speaking to one of the children. On one such occasion I asked the informer whether she knew our (warning) song and would sing it for us. She happily obliged and sang it out loud and clear. Others to watch for were the prisoners who acted as camp police or any of the guards. One of the games that we would play was to find pieces of paper, crumple them into balls and throw them against the electrified barbed wire. A shower of sparks would result and the paper would burst into flame. I think that this playground of ours must have been out of sight of the watchtowers, otherwise our little game would soon have been stopped.

Somebody had to be responsible for us and as my mother had been a teacher, she was put in charge. This meant that she did not have to go out and perform heavy manual labour like the other mothers. Like any good teacher she wanted writing materials and actually managed to see the camp commandant about this. He gave her such a reception, telling her that after six years of war they had other things to think of, that she was only too pleased to get away from him.

My mother did her best to try and alleviate the limitations of the concentration camp as far as we children were concerned. I remember her reciting English poetry to me, i.e. "Stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage." She would tell us of books that she had read, and when telling fairy stories to the little ones, who could not visualize a palace, she would describe it as three barracks one on top of the other. Many years later I heard from adults who had been children in that camp and who enquired after my mother; that they still remembered the stories that she used to tell them.

She would do her utmost to shield us from the reality of a concentration camp. When brutal or ugly scenes presented themselves around us, or when the women in the barrack had been stripped naked for some reason, she would cover Irene's or my eyes. At times she managed to obtain extra food for us, with the help of Czech friends.

I have a theory about the effect of preventing a young child from seeing reality. My sister Irene was 5 years younger than I, and my mother would usually prevent her from viewing the more brutal happenings in the barrack. I was left to see what went on and come to terms with it. Irene was still subjected to the sounds and it is possible that she imagined scenes that were far worse than what was actually taking place. That may well have had a more traumatic effect on her young, impressionable mind than what I witnessed.

Our arrival in Ravensbruck caused a great deal of emotion among the women there. Many had left their own children behind when they were incarcerated. The younger ones had not had any sexual contact with a man in years, and gave us older boys a lot of attention. But we also noticed that many of the women would weep when they saw us. I thought that this distress was caused by the aforementioned reasons, but the anguish seemed to persist with some of them. Then one day a woman told us that we were not the first children who had been in Ravensbruck, and that our predecessors had all been sent to Auschwitz.

Auschwitz? We knew the name from Westerbork, but why the tears? Then slowly the devastating, horrible truth was revealed about the gas chambers, and the whole genocide programme of Jews. Strangely, I do not recall a period of deep depression among our Hungarian women such as one would expect after hearing that in all likelihood all one's friends and relations had been brutally murdered. Could they not absorb the enormity of such a tragedy? Did they shield

themselves psychologically by saying: "This must be happening to someone else, but not to me?"

And what was my reaction? Throughout my stay in the camps I experienced some potentially very dangerous episodes and yet was never unduly perturbed by them. I had the conviction that nothing would happen to me, not even when it was made very obvious that we were going to be sent to the gas chambers within the next 24 hours and half our number actually disappeared. That does not mean to say that I did not live in fear and tension every day; it just indicates that despite the dangers, the humiliations, beatings and horror I did not doubt that I would survive. A safety mechanism perhaps. At the same time my logic told me that my chances of survival as a Jew were minimal, and as a result I would take greater risks than other prisoners. I knew that I had nothing to lose.

It is also interesting that despite having been in Westerbork since September 1942 and aware that trains left for Auschwitz weekly, we Hungarian Jews from Holland did not discover the truth until 1944. Not that everybody knew except us children: news of that magnitude would not have remained hidden. This was not the case with Jews from other countries. When later on in the Men's camps I met up with French Jews, they informed me that the BBC had been warning on the French broadcasts from 1942 onwards of gas in the Polish death camps.

I mentioned my mother's Czech friends. Shortly after our arrival in Ravensbruck, a prisoner called Riva Fridova approached my mother. Riva was a Mishling, a person who was half Jewish, and the red triangle that she wore above her prison number meant that she was political, in her case a communist. Her husband had been executed. She told my mother that the Czech women had been watching our group, that they had influential jobs and would try and help us where possible.

In the months that followed, Riva and my mother kept in touch and became friends. We would be advised of anything happening that concerned our group and of the latest war news. One of the Czech women worked at the bathhouse; it was arranged that my mother could draw a bucket of hot water occasionally, so that Irene could have a proper wash. When I developed boils, a Czech doctor would arrive at my barrack with dressings hidden in her bosom. I obviously did not present myself to the SS doctor at casualty because of the risks involved. Only once did an SS man assist in my recovery, and that was when I developed an abscess on my backside and could not march properly. The kick that this man gave me burst that abscess and it began to heal.

The Czechs were not the only group that distinguished itself in Ravensbruck. There were several barracks of female Russian prisoners of war. They seemed fearless and would tolerate no ill-treatment from anyone, irrespective of punishments. Unlike the Western powers, the Russians used their women as

combat soldiers in the frontline and these women were tough. When the 1000 bomber raids came over and nobody was allowed out of the barracks, these women would run out and wave to the planes and cheer. Apart from the Czechs they were also the only ones who took an active interest in us children.

I shall never forget how they would find out when a small child had a birthday. Then they would somehow get the ingredients, and present us each with a tart consisting of a one and a half inch cube of bread wrapped up in silver paper and with a decoration in jam on top. Then we would be invited to a party in their barrack where they would dance and sing their Red Army songs for us. Not much by present standards, but in that hell of starvation, murder, disease, abuse, fear, loathing and hatred, these incidents stood out like a light from heaven.

We had a Belgian boy with us called Jacques. He was about a year older than I and sexually fully developed. He was not quite normal and my mother had trouble with him. I remember giving him many a hiding for that reason. It seems that the Russian girls took quite an interest in Jacques, referring to him as "Mein Kavalier", and before long he was transferred to the Ravensbruck men's camp. You will hear more of him later.

Sometimes when I speak at schools, the children ask me about religion in the camps. One of the women in our group, a Mrs. Laufer, was very religious; she was the only one who took the trouble to work out approximately when the Jewish religious festivals, the Yom Tovim, were due. When it was Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur she would say the required prayers from memory and I believe that she fasted on the Day of Atonement. There may be something to this, for she was sent to Bergen Belsen with three tiny children and they all survived, as did her husband. Bergen Belsen was the camp where people succumbed in their tens of thousands to typhus and tuberculosis.

Mrs. Laufer and her husband had been friends of my parents, and I visited her in Holland after the war. She told me that one of her more horrible experiences in Bergen Belsen was the awareness that she was able to walk over the corpses of babies without feeling any emotion. As stated, she had three children of her own there at the time, the oldest being about four years old.

Then there were the Polish women. They distinguished themselves by two strong beliefs: they were deeply religious and viciously anti-Semitic. We had the Polish nobility there, as well as the peasant classes, and apart from their mode of expression, their attitude to us Jewish children was the same. Never a smile, never a kind word or a pat on the head, as one would use today when with a child. But they would take small pieces of their bread, put it together and form it into a cross on a pedestal and use this in their devotions. What better example that man does not live by bread alone? That was under conditions where a man I

knew was beaten to death by other prisoners because they suspected him in cheating when dividing the bread ration. I was once asked to deliver the Yom Kippur sermon in a synagogue. I spoke on religion in the camps and quoted this example. I am still not sure whether it suited the occasion.

Let us talk about baths. There was a shower room in Ravensbruck. Once about every six months we would all be marched off, told to strip and were able to take a hot shower, boys and women all together. We would have to share one shower with one or two women, but so great was the enjoyment of this luxury that nobody minded. I should mention though that ever since Ravensbruck I have had a horror of anorexic women. It was also the first time that I saw my mother naked. Other occasions were when there was a medical inspection by SS doctors. One of our group limped as a result of Polio. The "doctor" asked her why she was crippled and on being told the reason commented that all Jews were cripples.

These medical and racial experts also had a lot of difficulty with Irene who was blond, blue eyed and very beautiful. She did not conform to their textbook description of what a Jew should look like. Those of you who have seen the film "Europa, Europa" will know what I mean. They first tried to get my mother to admit that this was not her natural child. Then they tried to persuade her to give Irene up for adoption, as she would obviously be better off elsewhere. The amazing thing is that they even asked. When my mother refused, they had another close look at Irene and decided that her ears were Jewish after all. I have an idea that my mother kept Irene with her because she would rather have the child take her chances as a Jew in a concentration camp than be brought up as a Nazi by those murderers. Maybe my mother's action was just instinctive.

Ravensbruck was a centre for the Nazi medical experiments. We would see women with scars on their lower limbs about one inch wide and about a foot long. We were told that these women had been subjected to bone grafting experiments against their will. They had probably been fed properly while the healing process lasted, but I heard that eventually they were nearly all executed.

The barracks and we too, were infested with lice and fleas. Apart from the discomfort, lice cause typhus while infected fleas carry bubonic plague. On Sundays we did not work and would spend our time sitting in the sun destroying this vermin. I would kill about 100 at a time and the following Sunday there would be another 100 to get rid of, despite my daily washing from head to toe, summer and winter. I remember on one occasion holding a fairly philosophical discussion with a woman. Judging from her vocabulary and accent, she was a well bred, educated person. Any discussion in the camps invariably drifted to the subject of food. This time we were really getting away from reality and moving to a higher plane - and all the time lice were crawling out of this woman's clothing and spreading all over her.

I had managed to acquire felt slippers in the camp and they were full of fleas that I could not reach. So one Sunday I borrowed a bucket, filled it with water and soaked those slippers at the bottom of the bucket for half an hour. Then I put the slippers in the sun to dry, and as they dried, the fleas revived. It seems that one can't drown a flea.

From time to time the Germans would order an Entlausung, a delousing. We would have all our clothing taken from us, clean uniforms would be brought, and we would be packed like sardines into one room for a whole night while our barracks and old clothes would be fumigated. The problem was to be able to sleep during that night. You would lie on the shoulder or in the lap of the next person, sleep for a while and then change places. I arranged that I would put my head in the lap of a dark-haired, emaciated young girl with a pale pretty face, who sat alongside me. When next I opened my eyes it was daylight; she had sat there all night and let me sleep. Eventually we would get our clothing back again.

We did not stay in Barrack 23 for long. With much trepidation we were transferred to another barrack run by a German woman called Kate Peters. I do not remember what Kate Peters's designation was, whether she was political or otherwise. She always gave us to understand that her family was anti Nazi and that this caused her to be imprisoned. Kate Peters looked like a goddess and to us she behaved like one. She was a very tall statuesque blond woman, did not wear the camp uniform, which in itself made her stand out, in fact she looked rather like a young Wagnerian opera singer. She took a great liking to us children, me especially, as she claimed that I reminded her of her brother, and kept a motherly eye on us. At times she would upbraid a mother because she had not been informed that a child had had a birthday. To my regret I do not recall how the birthday was celebrated. She would invite us children into her private room in the barrack and get us to sing songs for her, after which she would hug and kiss us, also a rarity in that camp. She also made sure that we got as much food as it was possible to obtain.

I believe that Kate Peters saved my life. When I came out of hospital I was already fourteen and consequently had to be transferred to the men's camp. In the state that I was in I don't think that I would have survived the heavy work that we had to do in the men's camp. So when I received my call-up for transfer, Kate Peters took me by the hand like a small child and marched me across the camp to the administration barrack where she seemed to be on good terms with everybody, prisoner or SS. She arranged to have my departure delayed by three months and during that time, she and Riva saw to it that I was given as much food as they could obtain for me.

My aunt Marcza was with us in Ravensbruck. When after the war I met her in Holland, I asked her what had happened to Kate Peters, as both I and my mother and sister soon left that camp. Marcza told me that Kate Peters underwent a change of personality. She lost her good looks and became absolutely brutal to the people in her charge. A group of young Jewish Hungarian women from Auschwitz was sent to her barrack and according to Marcza, Kate Peters beat several of them to death.

I have often wondered what my attitude would have been to Kate Peters, had I met her again.

This was not the only metamorphosis that I heard of. Not long after I left, my mother managed through Riva to have herself and Irene transferred to the nearby Siemens labour camp where conditions were better. Someone had to keep an eye on the children and the Germans in their wisdom appointed a woman with a green triangle, who was there because she had killed her mother with an axe. You can imagine the feelings of the mothers, yet nobody could have taken better care of those children than that murderess.

Two other inmates stand out in my memory. One was a lovely young German girl in our barrack whom I befriended and who told me that she had been put into the camp for not being accommodating enough to her Nazi boyfriend. Sometimes people were incarcerated by the Nazis to serve as hostages for the good behaviour of their family. She was a fervent admirer of Hitler and a product of the Hitler Jugend, the Nazi equivalent of the Scouts. She would tell me of the wonder of Hitler and all the miracles that he had performed for Germany. Once I asked her how she reconciled the concentration camp with her beloved Fuhrer, and she replied with innocent eyes that if he knew about the camps he would never allow it.

The other was a young French woman with whom I became friendly because we could both speak English. Her name was Jenny, I think that she was half Jewish and she had worked in England for British intelligence. She had been parachuted into France, only to find the Germans waiting for her at the landing ground. She told me earnestly that according to the Geneva Convention she was a prisoner of war and should not be held in a concentration camp. She also said that she had asked for an appointment with the camp commandant in order to point this out to him. It seems that eventually she did get her appointment with Fritz Suhren; returning work parties told us that they had seen Jenny hanged outside the camp.

This brings me to punishment. There was a building inside the camp surrounded by barbed wire and it was called the Bunker. We used to pass close to it on our way to Appel. It was the Gestapo interrogation centre, and dreadful screams were sometimes heard emanating from there. Sometimes in the morning as we

marched to the parade ground one would see a woman clad in underwear only, who had been fastened to the barbed wire and left there for the night. I don't remember whether it was summer or winter when I saw this pitiful scene.

One last word about Ravensbruck Women's Camp. Although we children were not expected to work, on one occasion there was a blockage in the sewage system. We older boys were sent to dig it up, and I found myself working in raw sewage up to my knees.

### **RAVENSBRUCK MEN'S CAMP**

In October 1944 an eleven-year-old boy called Otto Kallus and I were transferred to the men's camp. Otto left his mother behind, a fine, but frail looking woman, a brother called Rudi aged about nine and a little sister called Emmy. She was the child described earlier who had been in the Revier with typhus and had been smuggled out before an anticipated selection took place.

Once again there was sorrow but no visible tears. Our mothers gave us parcels with our belongings, embraced us and said good bye. Mrs. Kallus made me promise to look after the younger Otto. The men's camp joined onto the women's camp and so we walked there. Upon our arrival and having been given new numbers and had our heads shaven, we were put into a barrack housing about 300 German Gypsy men and children aged from 4 years to my age. Those Gypsies had all come from Auschwitz, where hundreds of thousands of their race were gassed. With time more children were to join us, a French boy from the women's camp, named Herbert Klein, and eventually a group of Czech boys aged from nine to seventeen, all Jews. We found a Gentile Polish boy there of my age who had half his arm missing and who was rather pleased to join up with us, even though he spoke Polish and rather poor German only. Some months later a Polish speaking boy who had American papers joined us. In the months to come there would be more additions to our children's group.

The camp housed about 5000 people and was run by German criminals, who actually treated us quite fairly. The camp commander was an old army type, who could be quite decent as we were to find out. Most important, the food was much better. The soup was quite thick, contained potatoes and on Sundays pieces of meat. Otherwise the routine was not very different from the women's camp. Instead of a siren, we would be woken by a bugler who also blew "lights out" at night. Influence of the Wehrmacht camp commander, I suppose.

We also met up with an old acquaintance in the men's camp: Jacques. He had become the pet of the guards, had his own very nice and clean uniform, and used to assist the guards in beating up old Jewish men as they arrived from other camps. I was afraid that Jacques would make use of his new position to get even with me for the beatings that I had given him, but he kept his distance.

The Gypsy boys, who far outnumbered us, lost no time in introducing themselves: they beat us, much to the amusement of their elders. Once again we were assigned our sleeping quarters, five to two beds. Herbert Klein slept with Otto, the Polish boy and me, and a Czech boy eventually joined us. We found out that Herbert had very few clothes and seemed unused to looking after himself. I gave him one of my jerseys, for which he was grateful, but not grateful enough to co-operate with us: he would not wash himself every day. The vermin problem was bad enough without this and I was quite harsh with him, refusing to let him join us in bed until he had performed his ablutions. He did not have much choice really; he could either try to crawl in with the Gypsies, who would probably have kicked his teeth in, or join us. Otto and I still had the blankets that we had brought from Holland. Herbert used to stand at the foot of the bed and cry, but with time and some gentle encouragement became as adept at survival techniques and foraging for food as I was.

We were sent out to work without delay. During the following months I worked outside the Siemens labour camp digging trenches for water and sewerage pipes, building roads and similar heavy work. The Germans used a very effective method of supervising our efficiency. If soil or rubble had to be moved they did not use wheelbarrows; instead we would stand in a long line, evenly spaced out, between the source and the destination of the soil and with long-handled spades pass the material from one to the other. If the heap that you were moving became too big, then it meant that either you were working too slowly or the chap behind you was working too fast. In either case you would be beaten, usually with that six-foot spade, or kicked. So the work required a fine degree of co-ordination between prisoners to avoid trauma.

I remember an occasion, several months after we had arrived, when we were sent to work some distance from the camp. Nearby I noticed a forest of beech trees, so at the first unguarded moment I stole away from the other boys and went to see whether there were any beechnuts to be found. I had in the meantime managed to find some pieces of fur, as I will describe later, and had made gloves similar to the ones that traffic cops wear, right up to the elbow. There were beechnuts and I lost no time in filling my gloves with them. Then, suddenly, I had a feeling that something was wrong. I looked up and saw Fritz Suhren, the commandant of the women's camp, walking on a path about 25 yards away. Luckily he was looking in the opposite direction. I dropped flat on the ground behind a tree and was fortunate not to have been detected. I don't know what would have happened had I been found; a flogging would have been the least that I could have expected.

At one stage I was assigned alone to working in and cleaning a warehouse supervised by a crippled soldier of the Wehrmacht. The place was packed with suitcases and personal belongings of Jews and SS who had been at

Westerbork. It was a strange experience for I recognized many names, but I lost no time in seeing what I could find that would suit my purposes. On one occasion I had climbed right on top of the shelves to examine the contents of a suitcase when suddenly a quiet voice said: "What are you doing up there?" It was my supervisor. I made some excuse and hastily climbed down, soon to be transferred back to my usual work party. I believe that I owe my life to that soldier; if he had chosen to pursue the matter I could have been given 25 lashes or hanged.

There is another interesting aspect to the previous story. When I heard the voice of that supervisor I got the shock of my life. To this day I distinctly remember him saying to me: "Was machen Sie da oben?" (What are you doing up there?) Now there are two pronouns in German for the word "*you*". There is "*du*" which is more familiar, and the word "*Sie*" which is respectful. I once told this story at the German school and a teacher commented that it was hardly likely for a guard in a KZ (concentration camp) to have addressed a Jewish child with respect. And yet that is how I remember his words after all these years.

Some 60 years later I read an article that dealt with the attitude that KZ staff had to adopt to the prisoners. There was to be no familiarity and no fraternizing. Seen from that perspective it is quite possible that I was addressed with the non-familiar and distant *Sie*.

From time to time goods trains would be shunted into the siding at Ravensbruck. They came from the Death Camps, and were loaded with possessions of people who had been sent there. We boys then had to manhandle such railway trucks to a platform and help to offload them. Here again we would pinch whatever we could. The Gypsies would lay their hands on anything that glittered, such as costume jewelry, while I took fur, sewing materials, medical supplies, and once even found a German medical book dating back to the previous century. Libraries were in short supply in concentration camps and I was only too delighted with my book. The Gypsies gave me the title "Der Judendoktor" and began to discuss their ailments with me.

These foraging expeditions were actually extremely dangerous. If one was caught stealing Government property, as the Germans called all the things that they had stolen themselves, one would be severely punished and at the whim of an official could even be hanged. I was almost caught on two occasions. The first time we were marching back into the camp when suddenly two guards cordoned off a group of us and made us stand with our backs against a barrack wall. They then assigned one of the Gypsies to search us. I suspect that they didn't do the job themselves in case they caught lice. Each person had his pockets turned out and as things were found, he received a beating. These beatings did seldom kill one, but they had a cumulative effect and were very demoralizing. The boy fourth in line from me was examined and beaten, the third

and the second ones as well. Then came my turn. The Gypsy put his hand into my overcoat pocket, felt the wool and cotton thread and the bandages there and told the guard: "This one has nothing". He was a Gypsy and therefore no friend of mine. I can only surmise that to a Gypsy my loot was valueless.

On the second occasion we were again lined up against a barrack wall. It was quite dark by that time. I had pieces of fur on me and articles of clothing. As the search approached me and I was wondering what to do, I suddenly realized that I was standing with my back against a drainpipe. In the darkness I managed to stuff all my ill-gotten gains behind that pipe without being detected. Once again I was found with nothing, and returned later that night to retrieve those things.

We were supervised by the guards and Capos. Mostly the latter were not too bad; the war was obviously nearly over, this was a small camp where all the old hands knew each other, the camp commander was not a psychopath, it all helped. But a convalescent home this wasn't, as you will see.

I became friendly with some of the old hands, criminals all, and some of the people in the barrack. We would communicate in German and sometimes in English. They would tell me of the old days in that camp before the war and before Stalingrad put the writing on the wall. They told me how a Capo (a prisoner who had been put in charge of other prisoners) would be sent out with 200 men and instructed to return with only 198. How he did it was his concern. The favourite method was to tell a prisoner to take a walk towards the guards (Postenkette) that ringed every work party, and who would shoot to kill once one came within a certain range. A guard would be awarded with leave for every prisoner killed. Since its establishment, twenty thousand men had died in that little camp.

The barrack leaders would be murdering monsters, but there was retaliation. A Capo who overdid his elimination programme would be found with a spade cleaving his skull. A barrack leader would be found hanged.

One of the criminals that I became friendly with was a cripple nicknamed Hop-la-hop because of the way he walked. He wore a green triangle but a pink one (homosexual) would have been more appropriate, for he was always putting his arms around me and hugging me close. My sex education at that age was absolutely nil. I knew even less about homosexuality, but I did know that I didn't need Hop-la-hop draping himself all over me. Still, he was an interesting source of information and occasionally some food.

One day Hop-la-hop informed me that there was going to be a hanging and that every one would be forced to watch. I expressed my reservations about having to watch this. I had seen one woman who hanged herself in the women's camp, but Hop-la-hop told me I had nothing to worry about. "All they do is stand a man

on a chair, tie a rope around his neck, remove the chair and that's that," he told me. No reason for excitement. I don't know whether that execution did take place - I never saw it.

Meanwhile the German Gypsies were making the life of us Jewish boys an absolute misery. They were the scum of the earth, and as brutal to each other as they were to us. After the war I learned that they were abhorred also by Gypsies from neighbouring countries. Many of the men had been serving with the German army in Poland and Western Europe, when somebody discovered that they were non-Aryans, stripped them of their uniforms and put them in Auschwitz to be gassed. This did not seem to change their thinking much; as far as we Jews were concerned they were still good Nazis. The assaults, abuse and humiliation reached such a point that I was not prepared to tolerate it any longer and decided to talk to the barrack leader.

This however was not so simple: one of the unwritten rules of a concentration camp was that a Jew keeps a very low profile. "You don't like the way we treat you here? You would be happier elsewhere, Auschwitz perhaps?" This was a possibility, not only for me, but also for the whole Jewish group. After all, if we meant trouble, even if through no fault of our own, then what did they need us for? Concentration camps were not established for the administration of justice.

But then again, what did we Jewish boys have to lose? This existence left no room for self respect. So one evening, when I had had more than my share of being beaten up, I knocked on the shaven-headed barrack leader's door. I told my story and he asked me one question: "Are you the English boy?" I did not know of any other English-speaking boy so I said: "Yes". He sent me back inside the barrack.

Later that evening he returned together with the Lagerälteste, the head of all the prisoners in the camp, a severe looking man carrying a truncheon in his belt. That individual asked me to point out who had been assaulting us. I saw this as a sure invitation to my lynching and politely declined. The man screamed at me, repeating the question. I pointed out the worst culprit, who there upon received a beating with the truncheon. After this the Gypsies left us alone, at least while we were in Ravensbruck.

It took some time before I was able to understand what had happened. One day a few Gypsies that I was on speaking terms with came to tell me that there was an American boy in one of the barracks. Intrigued I accompanied them and found myself facing a tall, thin, very refined looking boy with almost girlish good looks. I addressed him in English. A look of fear crossed his face; he went white and did not answer me. I looked at his red triangle; on it was printed AM for American. One of the Gypsies started laughing: "He isn't American," he said. I quickly left, for unwittingly I had endangered this boy's life. Shortly after this the

American boy came to our barrack where he was careful to avoid me. Our Polish boy soon joined him and they shared a bed. This poor chap was Polish with American papers.

What I think had happened was this: it was known that there was an American boy in the camp. I spoke English and was mistaken for him. The barrack leader and his superior, who must have had a lot to answer for, decided that if the English or Americans liberated the camp, it would do them no harm if I could put in a good word for them. And while I was in Ravensbruck this stood me in good stead.

The Gypsies were not quite finished with me though. One day a group of them came and told me that I had been selected to cut up the bread ration. I don't remember why I did not refuse, maybe I couldn't, but I was aware that it was a trap. What I did know was that this was one of the most dangerous jobs in the camp, something that was proved to me after the war in horrible fashion. The loaves in the Men's camp were shaped like our rye bread, tapered at the ends. Without a scale it is very difficult to cut such a loaf without the end pieces looking bigger, or every piece weighing the same, and remember, I was dealing with very hungry, hostile, violent people. So I took the job, and made very sure that I kept the smallest looking piece for myself. Predictably, after the first division, the largest of those Gypsies rose from our table and tossed his ration at me. "What do you call this?" he said. "You can have mine" I told him and quickly exchanged the two pieces. I still have the image of the disgust on his face as he contemplated his new ration. And that was the end of the matter. Not long thereafter I was relieved of this task: It had not worked out as planned.

One day a Muselman came into our barrack, probably to beg for food. Muselmanner were prisoners who had become so emaciated and weak from starvation, that they could no longer work. They were skeletal, had little flesh left on their bodies and therefore always cold. They usually walked around during the day wrapped in their only blanket, which gave them the appearance of Bedouin, hence the name Muselmanner, Moslems. These people would spend their day in the camp scrounging and begging for food, and eventually would all be collected and put on transport never to be seen again. The Gypsies promptly attacked this pathetic creature and beat him until he managed to escape.

As mentioned before, the Gypsy boys greatly outnumbered us and there was nothing that we Jewish boys could do about this assault. But when it was over, I went to speak to the leader of the Gypsy boys, a chap with protruding teeth, which gave him a wolfish look, and by the name of Menelo. I asked him if his father was still alive, and what Menelo's reaction would have been if we Jewish boys had ill-treated his father the way he and his young thugs had molested that Muselman. Menelo said that he would have been most upset and eventually agreed that what they had done was wrong. The following day that same

Muselman came again into the barrack and the whole performance repeated itself. Once again I had been taught the separation between logic and emotion.

After about three months in the Men's camp, Otto, Herbert and I were told that a visit had been arranged between us and our mothers in the adjoining Women's camp. This was highly irregular, and I am sure that Riva or Kate Peters must have had a hand therein.

We met in a building at some halfway point. I don't think that there were any gifts, there couldn't have been. All that the meeting really achieved was to show one another that we were still alive and what our condition was. Herbert's mother was pathetically grateful that he had received one of my jerseys. My mother told me after the war that she was shocked by the change in my demeanour. As far as I was concerned, as pleased as I was to see my mother again and to hear about my sister, the experience merely helped to accentuate the loneliness and desolation that I felt before my mother's visit.

At one stage we found ourselves in a barrack run by a German criminal with pedagogic ambitions. He decided that it was a crying shame that we youngsters were not going to school and decided to do something about this. So he got all us Jewish boys together and proceeded to instruct us. The Gypsies, he decided, were uneducable and he may have been right there.

His first and only lesson I will never forget. He chose astronomy as his subject and began to tell us how the sun revolved around the earth. Some of the older Czech boys had received some schooling and one of them politely begged to differ. He received a terrible smack across his face, while the Block Alteste thundered: "You imbecile! Can't you use your eyes? Can't you see that the sun comes up in the morning and goes down in the evening?" But he never tried to teach us again.

Talk about hidings, each barrack had a barrack towel, that is right, one towel for about 600 people. It was hardly a bath towel either, just a rag about 60cm square. I had the belief that washing was important and even in winter when the water supply was frozen, I would rub down with snow. I think that if nothing else it helped me to tolerate the cold better.

The Gypsies had no such notions; you could tell a Gypsy at a glance by the dark ring around his face, where he had washed it daily at the expense of the rest of his body. I used to wash myself when the others were occupied differently, but on one occasion I was caught. The Gypsy boy who saw me ran screaming to the Kindervater, the Gypsy adult who was supposed to keep an eye on us. The child told him of the horror that he had witnessed. The Kindervater shouted at me: "You have the gall to dry your backside with the towel that we have to use for our faces?" and gave me a bad hiding. I suppose that he had a point.

One evening a German criminal with a pleasant face came into our barrack and announced that he wanted three boys to come and work for him in his cobbler shop. The Gypsies fell all over themselves, shouting and gesticulating, but he refused to have anything to do with them. He picked a Ukrainian, a Czech boy and me and the following morning we reported to him for work.

The shoemaking shop was a pleasant, well-heated place and the shoemakers there of all nationalities were kind people. One received a good lunch of thick soup at midday, something that others most certainly did not get. But what did these skilled artisans, who were employed making jackboots for the SS, want with us? We soon found out.

Upon our arrival we were shown a room measuring about 4 meters square that was packed to the ceiling with shoes and boots of every type, size and description. These had been brought from death camps where their owners had long since been cremated. The German explained to us that our task would consist in cutting up these shoes in order to see if anything was hidden in them. Outside it was 28 degrees below zero, people were walking around in open wooden sandals and we were to cut up perfectly good shoes. We were told that if we found anything we would be rewarded. We were each given a leather shoemaker's apron and a cobbler's knife and our task commenced. It was easy work and looked as if it could last until the war ended. The working conditions were most congenial, and I lost no time in persuading our German boss to let me bring Otto in as well. I also selected a fine pair of boots for myself.

High heeled ladies' shoes have a metal strut in the insteps that give them their typical curve. Bank notes were sometimes hidden therein. Men's shoes have a heel that can be hollowed out in order to hide coins or diamonds.

Otto and I decided that if we found any gold or diamonds they would not go to the Germans. We would keep them for ourselves and if that was impossible then we would dispose of such findings rather than see them going to aid the German war effort. But how would we justify our employment? With our childish logic we felt that paper money could not be as valuable as gold and diamonds, and that was what we would hand to our captors. In doing this we were taking a calculated risk, for we both knew that to be found with Valuta, as the Germans termed gold and jewelry, meant the gallows, with no mitigating circumstances.

We would sit there day in, day out, picking up a shoe, cutting open the instep and the heel, throwing it away, picking up the next shoe and so on. Anybody who has done mindless, repetitive work knows that one's thoughts can be far away and still the hands will continue with their appointed task. And so it happened one day that I saw something glistening among the scraps of leather in my apron. It was a golden 10-dollar piece that I had not even seen. With this find I

started trembling uncontrollably, which I thought no one noticed. What also drew my attention was a piece of leather in my apron with the imprint of this coin on it. If one side of the coin had left an imprint, then there had to be another piece of similarly imprinted leather for the obverse side of the coin. If that was found then the game would be up. Feverishly I began to search through the leather in my apron and amongst the pieces recently discarded and was lucky enough to find the other imprint. I took my cobbler's knife and went to the toilet where I cut the imprinted leather pieces to bits and flushed them.

Coming out of the toilet, I found one of the Polish workers standing there waiting for me. "I know that you have found something," he said, "Give it to me!" I denied all knowledge and brushed past him. Later on I waited for an unguarded moment and, using the cobblers' tools, I stitched that coin into the inner heel of my boot.

Some weeks went by. One day I was sitting next to Otto when I noticed that he had stopped working and was trembling. "Give!" I said, and surreptitiously he handed me a gold 5-ruble piece, which in due course was stitched into the inner heel of my other boot.

We made friends amongst the adults in the barrack, and would spend our evenings talking. One man was a German sailor whom I got to try and teach me navigation. Then there were two Norwegians, both captured for resistance activities. The one spoke halting English and we would converse. One had to be very careful whom one spoke to and what one said, for a misplaced word to an informer could land one in the hands of the Gestapo, but I grew to like and trust the Norwegians and would speak freely.

They had both come from a nearby camp called Sachsenhausen, where, they told me, people from Western countries were allowed to receive Red Cross parcels. In our hunger we would dwell on the contents of these parcels. Later on I would receive them myself and even after all these years I can still lovingly enumerate most ingredients of such a parcel.

Every day we would stand on Appel, and at the command: "Achtung!" we would come to attention and click our heels together. I have mentioned that boots were a luxury in that place and to prevent mine being stolen I would sleep with them under my pillow at night. One night I happened to look at the heels of my boots and saw the outline and imprint of two coins staring me in the face. This was the result of all my heel clicking. I then realized that I could not keep those coins any longer, for where was I to hide them?

I determined to speak to one of my Norwegian friends and find out whether he could exchange the coins for food. He was most reluctant and told me that there were certain unwritten rules for survival in concentration camps, one of which was not to touch Valuta. One would get camp fever, he explained, be sent to the

Revier and would lie there in delirium. All one's secret fears would come to the fore, and the SS doctors, well acquainted with this phenomenon, would be there to listen. One's next public appearance would be on the gallows.

I told him that as a Jew I had nothing to lose, and was willing to take the risk. In due course and over a period of time, he managed to get me 7 loaves of bread and a kilo of jam for those two coins. Needless to say Otto and I shared everything that we had. I estimate that those two coins together would have weighed as much as one Kruger rand. This means that at today's prices (2000) we paid 3,420 Rand for those 7 loaves and 1 kilo of carrot jam.

On a few occasions we found paper money. These would be handed over to our German boss, who in turn handed them to the camp commander who would then come and thank us and reward us with several slices of rye bread smeared with lard. One slice we always kept for each of our Norwegians.

Our work at the cobbler's shop was not all bread and jam or lard if you prefer it. It had a courtyard and there stood the block. This was a device one had to lie on when being flogged. One's feet would be locked into a box controlled by a lever and one's outstretched arms held down. The block had a downward slope towards the head, so that one's buttocks were elevated. The flogging was carried out by the camp commander alone or accompanied by one other person and they would use whips made of stitched leather and about an inch (2.4cm) thick. Ochsenchwanz (Ox's penises) they were called. When these whips showed signs of wear and tear they would be brought to us in the cobblers shop. I once asked one of the men there to hit me with this thing and it was very painful.

Watching the flogging is one of my most terrible memories. A man would be brought in and held down on the block. His buttocks would be felt to see whether he had padded himself, and if so, his trousers and underwear removed and he would be beaten on his naked behind. In some camps the victim was made to count each blow out loud, but I could not hear whether this happened in our camp.

I remember an occasion when the camp commandant and another man flogged an inmate, each one taking turns to strike a blow. Soon the victim began to writhe, then to scream horribly. Eventually in his agony he managed to pull one leg free from the box where it was supposed to remain locked in and he tried to kick his tormentors out of the way. This enraged them and they began to beat him as hard and fast as they could while all the time this terrible screaming rose to the heavens.

My German sailor navigator was once flogged. I did not see it and he told me that he took it in his stride. Maybe so, but in Sachsenhausen I saw a naked man

with his one buttock looking like a dried raw piece of steak. There was no skin left and I was told that this was the result of repeated flogging.

Next to the cobbler shop was the revier. Occasionally I would cut myself and if the injury needed attention I would go to the revier. I once arrived in time to see a corpse being carried out in a sheet. I accompanied the body to see how it was disposed of and we walked to a small shed which, when opened, was found to contain a heap of corpses. Our corpse was heaved on top of the others without any ceremony, after which the jolly souls who had done the carrying picked me up by my arms and legs and made as if to throw me on top as well. Many of those corpses were leaking and I was not too impressed with these men, but they were only pretending.

Years later a psychiatrist would tell me that the anticipation of a horrible event is just as damaging as experiencing the event itself.

Christmas 1944 we were all marched out of our barracks at night and made to stand in the snow and sing carols to the camp commandant. (Silent Night, Holy Night...) We each received a dried-out piece of steak for this.

That winter they also held a delousing, but in contrast to the women's camp, we were not given fresh clothing to wear while ours were being processed. So all the Jewish boys were chased stark naked out into the snow to stand and shiver, much to the amusement of the onlookers. I got the boys to dance the Hora and to sing in an effort to be warm. That stopped the fun of course and after a while they let us back into the barrack. I was told that on similar occasions people had caught pneumonia from this kind of nonsense.

By now the Russian front was approaching rapidly and the Germans were scraping the barrel for troops. Many of the older German Gypsies were battle-hardened soldiers, and one day they were told that as a special concession they would be taken out of the concentration camp and allowed the honour of once again fighting for Fuhrer and Fatherland. There was one snag though; they were still not Aryans and could not expect to be let loose and pollute the German population with their genes. Therefore, before being released, they would each have to submit to a vasectomy.

The Gypsies were overjoyed at this, volunteered happily and I remember going to have a look at them as they lay unconscious at the revier. Only two of them escaped this fate. One was a subnormal boy who at the last moment went and hid himself; the second one who did not look like a Gypsy at all, being blond, said: "You killed most of my family in Auschwitz and now you want me to fight for you? Forget it!" He was the only one who showed any character out of the 300.

The Gypsies believed that after the war another operation would simply reverse the vasectomy.

## **SACHSENHAUSEN**

But the Gypsies were not taken out of the camp. Instead they, we Jews and the rest of the camp were put into open coal trucks and sent to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. This happened about January or the beginning of February 1945. It was winter with a temperature of 28 below zero, a fact exacerbated by having to travel through the night in trucks that had no roofs. An armed guard was put into every truck and he sat on the edge of the truck facing us, his gun across his lap.

Those of us who had blankets were not too badly off; the others started collapsing from the cold and the biting wind. Then a man shouted at us to stand up. He had white hair, strange white-rimmed irises, and we could tell from his number that he had spent many years in this concentration camp. He wore a red triangle, an old time Communist, and may well have been a fighter in the Spanish Civil War.

He ordered us to march on the spot with him, turned to face the guard and, placing himself two feet in front of that individual, he began to sing. He sang German songs, songs that I had never heard previously, bitter, harsh and violent Communist songs. He sang songs of the Spanish Civil War, songs of the early days of Communism in Germany, songs full of hate. And all the while he stood marching on the spot, staring straight into the eyes of the guard, their faces close, while the guard stared back without blinking.

And we marched with him, right through the night. After a while we warmed sufficiently to throw off our blankets to the ones that didn't march and were lying on the floor of the truck. It was one of the most inspiring moments of the two and a half years that I spent in camps and his songs I still remember.

It was still nightfall when we arrived at Sachsenhausen, one of the oldest concentration camps in Germany and where 96,000 men had died. We were marched from the station to the camp, guards with projectors on their chests at our sides lest we should attempt to escape. As we marched through the gates we were confronted with barracks in fan shaped formation. On each barrack one word had been painted in giant letters forming the sentence: "THERE IS BUT ONE ROAD TO FREEDOM: OBEDIENCE, DILIGENCE, HONESTY, CLEANLINESS, SOBRIETY, TRUTHFULNESS, SELFSACRIFICE and LOVE OF THE FATHERLAND." Opposite this fan was the gate in a tower and in the top of the tower, facing the camp, the SS manned one of the biggest machine guns that I have ever seen.

We Jews and Gypsies were removed from the other prisoners and taken to our new abode - when I saw it my heart sank. It was a group of four barracks completely surrounded by a fence made of railway sleepers and barbed wire, and with its own gates and guards. If I remember correctly, the barbed wire mesh covered this camp as a mesh cover protects cheese - if one looked straight up at the sky one saw barbed wire. It was a camp within a camp and from tales that I had been told I recognized this as a Vernichtungs Lager, a destruction camp. It was in such blocks that people were put, usually without food and water, before they were sent to the gas chambers.

Our barrack was completely empty of furniture, no tables, no benches, no beds and with a layer of wood shavings on the wooden floor. It was mid winter and people slept in the spoon position, one body against the next and holding onto one another for warmth. If one wanted to turn over, all had to turn. I once woke in the morning to find that the person that I had held on to during the night had died, and I was hugging a corpse. The only food that we received was two boiled potatoes once a day.

To all of you who read this I hope that **HUNGER** is a six-letter word out of the dictionary. Let me tell you about hunger. We used to peel those two boiled potatoes, as we believed that to eat the peels would cause dysentery. Anyone who has tried to peel a boiled potato knows that the amount of potato left on the peel is minimal and yet a queue would form up in front of me of old men waiting to receive my peels. I was only 14 years old and so thin that when I put my childish hands around my waist, the index finger and thumb of one hand nearly touched those of the other hand. Surely those men could have taken those potatoes away from me? They could not have: they were already too weak and would come to us children in the mornings and ask us to fasten their shirt or coat buttons for them; they no longer had the ability to do this themselves. Otto and I were lucky: our Norwegian friends had been put into the Norwegian barrack where they had access to Red Cross parcels and once in a while they would come to the barbed wire and feed us tidbits.

We met up with another old acquaintance as well: Jacques. He was no longer the spoiled pet of the guards, although he still had his pretty little uniform. The Gypsies lost no time in grabbing him and beating him up. I did not see this, but was in my barrack when Jacques came running in, screaming in terror, and followed by a horde of gypsies, both young and old. The poor chap ran straight towards me, fell at my feet, clutched my legs and begged me to save him. I spoke to the Gypsies, and don't know what it was, whether they had already slaked their thirst for revenge or what, but they left him alone.

I, however, was not so fortunate. Next to our barrack was a shed where tools were kept. The Gypsy boy that I had pointed out to the prisoner camp commander in Ravensbruck got hold of me one day with about six of his pals,

dragged me into this shed and proceeded to give me the hiding of a lifetime, using the flat sides of spades. I don't know how this assault would have ended, if a German individual whom I had not seen previously had not interrupted it. I was in a bit of a mess and pretty upset, so he took me to his rooms, cleaned me up and made me comfortable.

Took me to his private rooms in a concentration camp? Only the barrack leaders and top officials amongst the prisoners had their own quarters. Who was this man and what was he doing living in a Vernichtungs lager? He did not wear the usual striped uniform but wore a combination of uniform and civilian dress and a peaked cap. That did not mean a thing; Germans loved wearing uniforms. I also do not remember him having the usual triangle and number that we prisoners wore.

Once I had regained my composure he began to ask me questions about my background and we had quite a pleasant conversation. He then sent me back to my barrack but told me to return at a certain time the following day. At our next meeting we again had a friendly discourse discussing politics among other things.

He was definitely a Nazi: once I asked him what he thought of the camps and the genocide of the Jews. "Look, Don," he said, "I like you, you're a nice fellow, but you are a little Jew and if we don't do something about it you will become a big Jew and that is no good."

This line of thinking need not have surprised me. Once in Ravensbruck Men's camp I saw a guard beat a nine-year-old Jewish boy with a truncheon. I later watched that guard go off duty and walk through the camp gate to his house a little way down the road. His children came running out of the house to meet him and he picked up the youngest one and tossed it in the air like any normal father would. This was a man who liked children. I asked myself: "What goes on here?" Then I realized that to this guard we were not children but a different species, Untermenschen, subhumans. If you come across a snake or a rat and kill it, do you stop to enquire whether it is young or old?

And yet his reply did surprise me. Here was a man who said that he liked me, who seemed to enjoy my company, with whom I could have a friendly conversation, and yet he was prepared to kill me for something that I had no control over, my race.

My next meeting with my newfound saviour was a little different. He asked me to tell him about my stay in the men's camp, how long had I been sharing a barrack with the Gypsies and how did I feel about them. What was he after? Finally he came to the point: the Gypsies had originally come from Auschwitz, Jews came to Auschwitz with diamonds hidden on their person, Jews were gassed at

Auschwitz and before going to the gas chambers would dispose of those diamonds, sometimes even throwing them on the ground in their despair. Survivors of Auschwitz picked up those diamonds or managed to obtain them through other means. There was a strong likelihood that the Gypsies had diamonds.

All this was perfectly true and I knew which Gypsies had diamonds. It was also true that to hide so-called Valuta from the Germans in a concentration camp was punishable by death. If I betrayed Gypsies to this Nazi there was a fair chance that these Gypsies would be tortured to reveal any others who had diamonds and that they might eventually be hanged. If they were and it would be impossible to hide my connection with this man, then my life was not insurable. It being so obviously near the end of the war, there was also the possibility that no hanging would take place, but that my Nazi would say nothing and keep the diamonds for himself. In any case this would not endear me to the Gypsies.

I began to lie for all I was worth, literally. He had me standing in front of him looking me straight in the eye, while he lay back in a chair with his hands behind his head and his feet on a table and threw question after question at me. I had shared a barrack and sleeping quarters with Gypsies since October. I had seen them get dressed and undressed every day. What did they have in their pockets? Did they ever boast to others about, or show off, the valuables that they had? If so who were the individuals involved? How was it possible that some one like myself, who had proved most observant during our previous conversations should suddenly be struck blind and dumb when the subject of diamonds cropped up? He insisted that I give him the information that he required. I denied any knowledge thereof, but he caught me out in lie after lie. Then he got up and said: "Come, I want to show you something." He took me to an adjoining room that had instruments of torture and punishment hanging on the wall: whips, chains, thumbscrews, handcuffs, etc. He told me that he would be most reluctant to have to use these on me, but had to have the information that he knew I possessed. He sent me away after telling me to think about this carefully and to come and see him the following day. I left his quarters with soiled pants and yet he had not laid a finger on me.

I was unable to sleep that night. What was I to do? The answer to most of the above questions was: "Yes". The Gypsies did have diamonds and I knew who had them. I also had no good reason to protect them and owed them nothing. But I did not want to co-operate with the Nazis or the Gestapo, to which this German might well belong. There was no way out but to continue to deny any knowledge and for how long could I manage to do that? I warned Otto and the others to keep away from me in case they were implicated; I did not tell them what I had experienced, in case they talked and the Gypsies got to hear about it and killed me before I could give evidence.

The following day I went to what I felt would be my final interview with this man. I was then told that he was no longer there, having been transferred elsewhere. I never saw him again.

In the meantime things were going from bad to worse for all of us. I had been given the job of removing the corpses from the barrack every morning. This involved dragging or carrying them to the gate from where they would be taken away on carts or stretchers. Actually, I was quite unemotional about this, even though I was only 14 years old. It did not mean anything to me. After the war I met a friend of my parents, a Mrs. Laufer, who had been in Bergen-Belsen. She told me that one of her most devastating experiences was walking over the bodies of babies in that camp and realizing that she did not feel any emotion. At the time she had three children of her own there, of which the oldest may have been four.

On one occasion our potatoes, instead of being handed out were simply thrown on the floor for every one to fight and scramble over, much to the amusement of the barrack leader and his friends. I did not join in this free-for-all, preferring to do without and when I looked around I saw four others stand aside. Five out of six hundred - were we less hungry than the others?

The barrack leader was a Rumanian with his nation's hatred of Jews. He was also a sadist and used to enjoy prohibiting us from going to the toilet. Some of us were children ranging from five years old upwards. I remember one such occasion when we had all been locked away from the toilet, which consisted of a pit dug between the barracks with a log on a tressle for a seat. I think that the prohibition was for Jews only that time. The door to the barrack was open and a guard had been placed there with a pickaxe handle to enforce this order. There had been some pitiful scenes with some of the children who eventually had to use the inside of the barrack, much to the discomfort of the others who would beat those children. Came nightfall and the guard at the door sat himself on a chair with his club between his legs. I watched him closely until I saw that he had fallen asleep. Then I got up and crawled on my stomach between the legs of the chair on which he was sitting. I thought that if he detected me I would throw him over, chair and all, and run back into the darkness of the barrack. I returned the same way that I had come.

There was a German prisoner who used to come and talk to the children. He would select a Jewish boy of about seven or eight, crouch down in front of him, affectionately put his arms on the boy's shoulders and proceed to tell the child very gently that he was employed building a gas chamber for Jews. From time to time he would re-appear to inform us of the progress that he was making. He did not live in our four barracks, so he must have taken some trouble to get to us in order to convey his information. By that time we had Jewish children with their fathers or older relatives in that Vernichtungs lager, except that the men stayed

in other barracks. Of all the inmates there I had probably been in the camps the longest and the fathers would come and ask me what I thought of this gas chamber story. I told them that they were dealing with an obvious sadist, and to ignore him completely.

Not very long thereafter the barrack leader came and told us all to prepare for transport. We would be leaving that night. We started gathering the few belongings we had, but he told us not to bother - we would not need them. Once again I was asked what I thought of this. I had a strong conviction that nothing would happen to me, so I told my interlocutors to take this instruction to prepare for transport whence it came: from a sadistic anti-Semite. I went to sleep as usual, and we were not disturbed that night, but the following morning, when some of the children went to the other barracks, they found them empty and their relatives gone.

I now determined to get out of that death camp at all costs. One day I noticed two men dressed in white coats coming into the barrack. Their red triangles were marked NL (Netherlands). They were Dutch doctors. I introduced myself and asked them for assistance. They answered that they could do nothing for me. However, they worked at the camp hospital and if I could get there they would be able to help me with food. I was also told their names and where to locate them at the hospital.

We had developed the symptoms of malnutrition: emaciation, boils, abscesses, sores around the mouth and eye infections. These used to suppurate, and when we awoke in the morning our eyes would be glued shut and our faces covered with pus. One's first task in the morning was to feel one's way to the wash room and wash one's eyes and face. The barrack leader would not allow us to go to the hospital for treatment, nor did he call for assistance. He knew that people were dying daily in his barrack. His responsibility was limited to ensuring that no infectious diseases broke out, for if they did, then he and the rest of the camp could be affected.

So for one whole week I only washed my eyes in the morning to enable me to see and allowed the pus to accumulate on my face. Then I presented myself to the barrack leader and asked to see a doctor. The Block Alteste took one look at me and sent me to the hospital accompanied by a guard. The Dutch doctors there made sure that I was fed, given medical treatment and, most important, a note stating that I was to return daily for treatment. I don't remember how, but I know that I got Otto to come to the hospital as well.

We made several useful contacts there. One was a Dutch doctor who was in charge of the terminal tuberculosis ward. Nobody would enter there, so I could eat undisturbed. He did warn me of the danger of contracting TB, but being Jewish and considering where I had come from, I felt that the risk was worth

taking. Otto was not so sure, and did not accompany me, wisely as it turned out, for years later when my lungs were X-rayed in South Africa, tuberculosis tubercles were found.

I don't remember how I made my second contact. He was a Pole who worked in that hospital. The first time that I had a chat with him he gave me his office number and told me to come and see him on my next visit. When I duly arrived I met him as he was walking away from his office, so he told me to go there and wait for him. I entered his room and found myself standing in the hospital mortuary. The room was filled with three-tier beds with naked corpses on them lying head to toe. Many of them were of young men, and they all had their numbers written on their thighs in blue indelible pencil. I spent some time looking those bodies over and even experimenting with them. I had been told that in cases of malnutrition one could develop oedema in the limbs, so that if one pressed a finger into the flesh, it would leave a depression. The flesh would not readily return to its original position. I don't remember the result of my experiment though.

My Polish friend eventually returned, gave me some food and we had a pleasant conversation. It is rather indicative of the brutalizing effect that the concentration camp had on its inmates. Where else would one send a fourteen year old to be on his own with all those corpses?

I told my Dutch friends about the disappearance of half our number at our "camp". They told me that there was nothing that they could do for Otto and me unless we managed to make our way to the Dutch barrack, whose number I was then given.

Right behind our barracks was a section that has become notorious. Printers, forgers, printing plate experts, jewelers and mathematicians inhabited it; some of those people were Jews and I had the opportunity of meeting one of them. It was here that Sterling notes were forged, with which the Germans tried to flood the world, and which were used to pay non-German contacts and spies. After the war I was to discover that these forgeries of Sterling were so accurate that eventually the British were forced to withdraw all their twenty pound notes from circulation. It was also rumoured that some of the gold and silver that the Nazis had plundered was stored in those barracks.

One day we heard a loud commotion, eventually followed by shooting. I went to investigate and found that a number of prisoners from the main camp had attacked this forgery section and were attempting to loot it. The guards had opened fire on them and there was pandemonium. I also noticed that the German guard at our rear gate had left his post in order to have a better view and was standing some five meters from the gate, which was open. This was the opportunity that I had been waiting for. I quickly returned to our barrack, grabbed

Otto and my blanket, ran back and then we slowly and nonchalantly ambled out of that gate and made our way to the Dutch barrack.

Upon our arrival there we were put in the care of a tall blond man by the name of Nobel. Mr. Nobel had been a member of the Rotterdam police force and had worked in their photographic department. He had been caught falsifying papers for the Resistance. Up to that moment we had not attended a roll call in Sachsenhausen, possibly because of the nature of the camp where we were staying. It is therefore possible that we were not missed from our barrack, and I don't know how the barrack leader of the Dutch barrack accounted for us; we certainly did not stand roll call there either.

It is difficult after all these years to describe the relief that Otto and I felt to be rid of those horrible Gypsies. I cannot speak for Otto but I did feel pangs of conscience for having left behind our Jewish friends, but under the circumstances, what else could we do? I saw it at that time as a case of survival.

Two events stand out in my memory of the time that we spent in the Dutch barrack and they were both air raids. The American Super fortresses would fly over in groups of about 70 planes each and I once counted 15 such groups. These were the dreaded 1000 bomber raids. They flew so high that those giant planes appeared to be the size of one's fingernail and their contrails made streaks across the whole sky. The earth would tremble with the roar of their engines, and when they dropped their bombs on Berlin, 25 km away, the barracks would shake.

During an air raid we would be confined to our barracks and a guard with a sub machinegun placed outside. Sachsenhausen, like most large concentration camps, was surrounded by factories, all working for the German war effort. One day the Americans paid us a visit. We watched them from our windows and saw what their modus operandi was. First one plane would drop a smoke bomb on a target, then the following group of bombers would all drop their bombs wherever that smoke bomb hit. One would see the smoke bomb drop among the factory buildings and a few seconds later all those buildings would vanish in a cloud of smoke, and the whole camp would shake from the impact of the explosions. It was an awe inspiring and exciting spectacle, and as afraid as we were, it was still a source of immense gratification for us to see the Germans suffer.

The barracks were made of wood with wooden crossbeams and in ours a chimney protruded through the roof, although its stove had long since been removed. When the bombs dropped there would be a roar as if a train was passing overhead. This would allow us a few seconds time to seek cover. We were lying prone on the floor during this bombardment, when someone shouted, "Stay clear of the beams!" Very sound advice, for if a beam crashed down on one, serious injury or worse could be the result. But how does one

avoid lying under a beam in a wooden barrack? We were still feverishly changing our positions when the bombs hit; our barrack seemed to have been spared, and yet a terrified cry was heard. Then every body burst out laughing: one of the men had been lying under the chimney; the soot therein had shaken loose and covered him from head to toe. He felt something hit him, opened his eyes and found that he had turned black all over. He was still in shock when the raid ended.

The next air raid was more dramatic. Again the Superfortresses came over, again the first smoke bomb streaked down to land amongst the remaining factories, which would vanish. But then a second smoke bomb fell right outside the wall of the camp and when the dust and smoke cleared, we saw that part of the wall had disappeared. The third smoke bomb landed amongst our barracks.

Between our barrack and the next was a tiny, underground air raid shelter. Nobel and I looked at the guard with the machinegun and saw that his knees were shaking. We could already hear the roar of the descending bombs when we jumped out of the window, ran past that guard and dived headlong into the shelter. What happened next is a blur in my memory; I felt myself lifted by an unseen force and hurled the length of that shelter. I found myself glued to its wall, with the distinct impression that my feet were not touching the ground. The pressure on me was such that for a moment I could not breathe. When we surfaced we found that our barrack had survived, but its rear wall had vanished. Of the barracks behind ours only burning ruins remained, and the cry was heard: "Leichenträger, leichenträger!" (Stretcher-bearers).

It was in the Dutch barrack that Otto and I received our first Red Cross parcel. Every Dutchman received one, Otto and I had to share. So I took myself off to find the German barrack leader, knocked on his door and when invited in found him and his German underlings sharing a Red Cross parcel. My protests resulted in a mighty kick and the door being slammed behind me. I suppose that half a parcel was better than none.

I have not told how we came to be accepted by the Dutch. After I had spoken to the Dutch doctors in the destruction camp, I decided to remove the red and yellow star with the letters UNG for Hungarian from my clothes. Definitely not allowed, but by that time I don't think that anybody noticed or cared. It was about one month before the end of the war. I spoke Dutch, I had no papers and could tell where I had lived in Rotterdam, who was to question me? I do not think that Otto copied my action.

### **THE DEATH MARCH**

On or about the 19<sup>th</sup> April 1945, Sachsenhausen was evacuated due to the approach of the Russian front lines. The whole camp was in turmoil, with

everybody, guards, officials, and prisoners mixing freely. While awaiting the evacuation, Otto and I happened to find an unconscious man sitting on the log that served as a toilet seat. He was bent double, with his head and arms hanging between his legs, and saliva dripping down from his mouth and nose. We went into the Dutch barrack to get assistance for this man, but the Dutchmen that were there just laughed at us. The Dutch tended to be a cut above many of the other prisoners, but such was the brutalisation of the concentration camp that a request for assistance only aroused merriment.

We were evacuated one barrack at a time, and every prisoner was given a loaf of bread and a sausage, so I was told. It was already pitch dark when the turn of our Dutch barrack came, and we took our blankets and marched out. By that time there were no more rations to distribute, so we received no food at all. Before long we noticed a red glow behind us; it seemed that Sachsenhausen was burning. We had not walked far when a terrible sight presented itself. Right in front of us lay the corpse of an old man in a pool of blood. He lay on his back with his mouth open, his white hair and pale face glistening in the moonlight and his head surrounded by a halo of blood. His arms were stretched out above his head as though in surrender, and his eyes looked straight up at the heavens that had forsaken him. We were forced to walk over that body, our first but not our last.

This apparition set the tone for what was to follow that night and for the next two weeks. We were made to march 53 km that first night and the next day before we were allowed to sleep and about 30 km. most days thereafter. Some days we did not have to march at all, possibly because of fluctuations in the front line. All in all we must have marched some 150 km. Everyone who could not keep up was shot. Even though I saw no casualties among our Dutch group, we kept on passing and stepping over the bodies of those who had gone before us.

Thirty kilometers a day is no problem for a soldier with a full pack. We were starved, emaciated and with little strength except our will to live and the force of our despair. Otto and I, who had survived on two potatoes a day for the past three months and were not used to getting Red Cross parcels, could not keep up with the Dutchmen. Slowly but surely we dropped back and the others, egged on by the guards, overtook us. Soon we were in the last row and still dropping back towards the possibility of imminent death by shooting. Then a few Dutchmen detached themselves from the column, picked up Otto and carried him. Two others took hold of my arms and dragged me along. In the days that followed I was to see men leaving their column in order to grab a few potatoes lying at the side of the road. A burst of machinegun fire would follow. These Dutchmen had risked their lives to save ours.

It was after this incident that the Dutchmen placed us children at the head of the column, so that they would march at our pace. This worked, the guards did not

object, and we continued in this fashion for the remainder of the march, albeit somewhat slower than before.

During that first night in which we were made to march 53 km., I became utterly exhausted. Then we passed a wagon drawn by prisoners and laden with the private possessions of the guards. The wagon had been piled so high that a lot of the baggage had fallen off and the guards were shouting and swearing. As we passed, a guard called me over and told me to climb on top of that wagon and ensure that nothing more fell. I climbed on top and promptly passed out and it is arguable that this wagon saved my life.

I do not know how long I slept on top of that wagon but everything collapsed again, trapping my Dutch blanket. I quickly joined the prisoners who were helping to push that cart, hoping that in the darkness of the night my disappearance and dereliction of duty would not be noticed. I did not push that vehicle but hung on to it and let it pull me along. Then I became aware that there were several soldiers' knapsacks hanging from the back of the wagon. Waiting for a cloud to cover the moon, I surreptitiously put my hand in the sack dangling in front of me and felt a loaf of bread. Slipping it inside my overcoat I made my way back to the Dutch column, which was still marching alongside. That loaf was speedily divided between Nobel, Otto and me. It was the only food that we were to eat during the first three days of that march.

After a few days I noticed men taking their shoes off and soaking their feet in any available water. Their feet would swell and when told to resume marching they could not get their shoes back on. Under those ghastly circumstances this in itself was a death sentence. I determined not to make the same mistake and during the fourteen days duration of that march never took my boots off once. It was as well, for when I did remove my footwear once the war was over, the condition of my feet horrified me. Today I have flat feet and am sure that this was caused by that march.

During the fourteen days of the march we walked either for three days at a time without food, or the next three days without water. We would march through grain fields and try and capture a handful of grain. When we went through forests we ate the leaves of the trees that we could reach. As described previously, we once passed a mound of fresh potatoes in a field and people detached themselves from another column and dived onto those potatoes. A burst of machinegun fire put an end to that venture.

The guard who had done the shooting was a middle-aged German walking alongside us, who only minutes before this had been showing us pictures of his wife and children. C'est la guerre. We crossed a stream and half of us jumped into it to drink, despite warnings that it was probably typhoid infested. One day we marched into a village and stopped to rest in the market square. Otto, Nobel

and I went to reconnoiter and discovered a water pump in the backyard of a house. Happily we slaked our terrible thirst - water bottles we did not have. The pump made a squeaking sound and suddenly there was a roar. The whole column had heard it and about 800 men were rushing toward us. We got out of the way just in time.

Once I saw the dry stone of a plum or a similar fruit lying in my path. I picked it up and sucked that pip whenever I was thirsty. It was probably my imagination, but from time to time I would taste the fruit that had covered that stone. It also helped to keep my saliva flowing. The scenery would change; forests would alternate with fields and I did not notice the moment of transition, such was my stage of exhaustion.

All this time we were being strafed by Allied planes. It would reach a point where we just had to hear the first sound of a diving aircraft and we would literally hurl ourselves off the road, down thirty-foot embankments, falling and tumbling as we went. A German farmer passed us with his wife and children sitting on a wagon; half an hour later we passed them, all lying dead on the side of the road. We saw German army ambulances driving towards the front, laden with ammunition. Every moving creature and vehicle was liable to be machine-gunned.

One day we passed the remains of a horse in a field. It must have been hit by an explosive for it was in pieces. We got permission to fasten the pieces of meat to branches from a tree, which the men then carried on their shoulders. That night we stopped at a farm and made ourselves comfortable in the barns. An American Negro prisoner volunteered to roast this horse for us, so the men provided him with firewood for a barbecue and then sat back to wait. Before long we became aware of a smell that most of us, and I certainly, had not experienced for years: the delicious aroma of roasting meat. Hours went by and our anticipation became unbearable. Finally the whole barn went forth to have a word with our chef. We found the meat nicely browned but of the American there was no trace. We had come to eat the horse, so we cut the meat up and divided it so that every one received a portion. Happier than I had been for a long time I retired to the barn.

There I soon understood why the cook had vanished. The meat looked delicious, its juice was heavenly, but one could not eat it. It was so tough that try as I might, I could not get my teeth into it or bite off even one piece. I chewed that meat until I could not move my jaws any more but all I got was the taste and the juice. Please don't call me a racist, but had that cook been found I swear that we would have eaten him instead.

About a week after we had left Sachsenhausen, our column reached the top of a hill. Below us lay a tiny forest with paths leading into it from various directions. From our vantage point we could see columns of prisoners being driven into that

forest on every path. All going in, none coming out. Once again the alarm bells started ringing. I had heard of this procedure; this looked to me like the preparation for a massacre. Why should they bring prisoners from every point of the compass to this one place? Upon reaching the forest we were told that we would spend the night there. The Germans were placing machineguns around the perimeter of the forest. I detached myself from the Dutch group, called Otto and began to look around. Eventually I found a fallen tree, which Otto and I maneuvered so that we could lie alongside it, keeping that log between the guns and ourselves.

I do not know what was meant to take place in that forest, maybe the whole thing was a symptom of my paranoia. But that night the earth started shaking with the sound of artillery fire. The Russians had broken through and we were hastily made to continue our march.

Another episode featuring forests happened when we had been plodding all day in pouring rain. Again we were sent into a forest and told to spend the night there. I borrowed a knife, climbed a fir tree as high up as I could and on the way down cut off every branch that I was able to reach. With those branches Otto and I built a shelter and lay down on the sodden earth to sleep. When we awoke the next morning our shelter was gone, and we were lying in a pool of rainwater. Some Poles had waited for us to complete our work and had then removed those branches from two sleeping children to use for themselves.

I must tell you about sleep on this march. With sunset we would march to the nearest forest or farm and stop for the night. I hardly ever remember lying down, such was my exhaustion, and assume that I must have dropped wherever we halted. What I do remember very vividly was having to get up the next morning. My legs would not obey me – it felt as if they had been fastened to the ground a la Gulliver in Lilliput. It was an agony that had to be overcome, and quickly too. We would fall asleep on any surface, in puddles, and I have already described that one could continue to march while being oblivious of one's surroundings.

One other incident is worth relating. I have described how we would receive a piece of bread, or a potato, or a handful of grain once in three days and how we ate leaves from trees. At one of our halts in a forest a man called me to accompany him. Stealthily and circumspectly he moved into the forest until we came to a clearing. There he triumphantly showed me a fire that he had made with an old rusty tin on top. In the tin simmered a whitish liquid. "What is it?" I asked him; "A frog," he said. I could not touch it.

One day we stopped to rest at a place where two prisoners were sitting. When we were ordered to resume marching those two did not move. A German soldier repeated the order - still the two men did not obey, sitting there and staring blankly into space. One was so close to me that I could have touched him. The soldier loaded his rifle and repeated the order: "Get up!" I knew that something terrible was going to happen and wanted to scream: "Don't shoot!" but did not have the courage. A shot rang out, and the man nearest to me fell onto his side.

Not a muscle in his face had moved. The remaining prisoner got to his feet and continued walking.

Many years later I was to deliver the eulogy at the graveside of Annush Strauss, one of the members of our Association of Jewish Holocaust Survivors. I told how Annush had been through the same experience as I, but Annush had found the courage to tell the executioner that if he decided to shoot a woman who could no longer walk, he would have to shoot her first. The soldier slowly put his gun aside and the woman was saved by Annush's bravery. That woman survived to live in America. I told my story as well, in order to put the incident involving Annush into perspective. I did not mention one detail: Annush at that time was 34 and I was 14. Perhaps she was beyond caring; perhaps she was not as demoralized by fear as I was.

Not long thereafter we awoke one morning to find the ground littered with yellow leaflets. They contained a message from the Allied commanders, stating that they knew precisely which German units were operating in this area and that unless the shooting of prisoners stopped, those implicated would be held responsible after the war ended. I saw no more shooting after this. I was tempted to pocket one of those leaflets as it would have made a remarkable and dramatic memento, but was afraid of what would happen if I was observed. Out of the 45,000 men who had left Sachsenhausen, 6,000 were to be shot during that 2-week march. In 2005 I came across statistics that put the numbers that left Sachsenhausen on that Death March at 36,000 and the death toll at 18,000.

Once we halted to rest and I noticed people standing at the side of a ditch and looking into it. I joined them and saw a number of corpses of men lying there who had been shot from the rear. They looked well fed and wore immaculate concentration camp uniforms, the kind only worn by top officials. I assumed that this had been the final leave taking from the SS that these men had served so well.

While I was standing there, Nobel came up to me and said: "You know, you don't have to look at these things." "It does not mean a thing to me," I answered. He was to remind me of that conversation after the war.

About the thirteenth day of our march we went through a German village near Hagenau in Mecklenburg Schwerin. The inhabitants lined the streets to watch us. Suddenly a little boy called out: "Mother, those are children." "No," the mother answered, "Those are bandits". A bandit who looked like a six-year old? Whether she believed this or just said it for the benefit of the neighbours I do not know. The war was to end one week later, she did not have to pretend, and in any case could have kept quiet. I think that this little episode accurately reflected the thinking of the German population.

## **LIBERATION**

Once again we were halted at a forest for the night. We were now very close to the front line, with the sounds of gunfire everywhere and planes being shot down

overhead. That night I began to pray as I have never prayed before or since. I was not praying for my life. I prayed that after all these years of horror this terrible war would come to an end. I prayed for my parents and Irene, none of whom I expected to see again. After the experiences of the past two weeks I did not think that my father whom I knew to be a sick man, or my mother and a small child like Irene could possibly have survived the hunger, the exhaustion and continuous shooting that we had witnessed.

The following day we still rested in that forest. When there was a lull in the shooting, our guards once again attempted to get us onto our feet and to continue the march. One man had climbed a tree and was watching the fighting in the distance. He now called to one of the guards to come and look. This guard also climbed a tree and saw Allied tanks advancing on the road that we were to follow. He climbed down, took his rifle by the barrel, smashed it against a tree and, throwing the broken pieces away, simply walked off. For us the war was over. The date was the 2<sup>nd</sup> of May 1945; I had been imprisoned for exactly 2 years, 7 months and 16 days.

For years we prisoners had dreamed of the end of the war, and the event had often featured in our discussions. We had tried to picture our liberation: tanks breaking through the gate, and our falling on the guards and tearing them to pieces. We even said that after the war we would not return straight home, but would first gladly each serve 10 years of our lives as guards of those who had tortured us.

Now here was the reality. Our guards were no longer the hated and feared SS, but ex prisoners who had exchanged their concentration camp uniform for that of the Wehrmacht. We lay there and watched them leave: - nobody stopped them, no one touched them. Perhaps we were physically and emotionally too exhausted to think of revenge. All day we watched as the spectacle of war took place before our eyes. American jeeps roaring East, Russian tanks plodding West, for we were at a place where the two armies met. A German Panzer came along and left the road to stand in a field. Its driver emerged carrying a bazooka and proceeded to fire a shell into the tank, which caught fire. A column of Wehrmacht soldiers came marching in perfect formation, stopped on the road in front of us much to our trepidation, disarmed completely and continued marching towards the American lines. I got up and examined the weapons that they had discarded and that had taken such a toll of our lives, but did not know how to use them and threw them away.

There were some Russian boys amongst us. They suffered from no such ignorance, picked up guns and headed for the nearest German farm. Soon we heard shooting. The boys came back empty handed and with one of their party wounded. They left him at the side of the road. Eventually a few Russian tanks lumbered along with infantry sitting on top of them. The Russian boys called to them, the tanks stopped and after a brief conversation one tank swiveled its gun and proceeded to pump shell after shell into that farm house.

All day long there was movement; people got up, people left. I, and I think most of my party, stayed where we were, just resting although we had no food. The following day a number of the Dutchmen got up to leave and asked me to accompany them, but I still did not feel strong enough. Nobel also stayed, whether from fatigue or a sense of duty to Otto and me I do not know. The next day Nobel, Otto and I together with four other Dutchmen left and returned towards Hagenau behind which the American lines were situated.

It was still quite a distance and we eventually came to a Russian check post. One of the Russians spoke German and he asked us why we wanted to leave what had now become the Russian zone. We explained that we came from Holland and that the shortest distance home was via the American zone, not Moscow. He then warned us that we would come to a fork in the road and that we should take the one fork and not the other. "Yesterday", he said, "A party of you Dutchmen came through here and took the wrong road. They walked into an SS ambush and were all shot."

On the way to Hagenau we went through the village where Otto and I had been identified as bandits. The place seemed deserted, the shutters closed, and I had the impression that the population was afraid of the seven of us, mostly dressed in striped concentration camp uniforms. Any healthy man could have handled all of us put together, but these were the brave Germans. We stopped to rest in the village square, when suddenly a door opened and a pretty little blond girl came out. She ran straight towards me and started talking and playing and I was only too glad to play with her. It was such a normal thing to do and perhaps she reminded me of Irene. The Dutchmen watched this in amazement and asked me how I, a Jewish boy, could bring myself to play with a German child. I had no answer for them; I just knew that I had done no wrong.

Upon entering Hagenau we found the place crowded with refugees, German soldiers and ex prisoners. I think that we split up in order to try and find food. By now we had probably not eaten for about five days. I was walking down one of the streets when I saw some cheese rinds lying in the gutter. Such was my hunger that I began to eat those parings, when suddenly a voice said in German: "Come and sit down, boy". It was a German soldier busy cooking food on the pavement and he shared his meal with me. It has always been a moment of supreme irony for me that the first decent food that I ate after the war should have come from a German soldier.

By now I was again too weak to walk and I remember that Otto and I took turns being wheeled on a bicycle that somebody had "liberated". We were directed to a Luftwaffe camp outside the town which had been transformed into a Displaced Persons (DP) camp. Otto and I joined up with ten other boys of my age.

We were housed several to a room and to my surprise received no medical attention. The food was also disappointing, soup made from potato peels, but at least you could get as much as you wanted. From time to time we would receive

a Red Cross parcel. In those parcels were cigarettes and one day we boys decided that it was time for a celebration. The war was over, Germany had been defeated, the guards were gone, the shooting had stopped and we were alive! True, we were not home yet or re-united with our families, but from now on nothing more could go wrong.

We managed to exchange some cigarettes with a German farmer for butter and a bag of potatoes, "liberated" a small wash tub and proceeded to make chips. We gorged ourselves. This was a mistake; we had not eaten any fat and hardly any meat for years and our bodies could not take this rich food. We all got diarrhea and within a week 8 out of the 12 of us were dead. Years later a cardiologist would tell me that this food must have put such a strain on our weakened systems, that the ones who died probably suffered heart attacks.

This was the pattern with every group of concentration camp survivors throughout liberated Europe.

In the meantime I had contacted the American soldiers in our area and make friends with the Jews among them, including a soldier named Ben Botwick from New Jersey. The soldiers were most interested in the stories that I had to tell. Outside their barracks, German POW's were employed peeling potatoes. I remember a sergeant listening to my tales of woe, pulling his pistol from his holster, unloading it and telling me: "Here, take this, go outside and shoot the lot of them." I stood in the doorway and aimed the pistol at the nearest German. When he looked up and saw me he fell backwards off his bench trying to get out of my line of fire. The next German that I aimed at also disappeared in no time. Eventually I had many of those men running all over that yard. Not one had the courage to call my bluff. Childish, of course, but it gave me a great deal of satisfaction.

One day we ex-prisoners were told by Red Cross personnel to report to a clothing shop in Hagenau in order to be issued with new clothing. Although Otto and I did not wear the striped camp uniform, we had worn our present outer garments since about the time that we had been sent to the Men's camps seven months earlier. For the past two weeks we had literally lived in them day and night, sleeping in mud and rain. A change was due.

I arrived rather late at this store and the owner peremptorily ordered me out and refused to serve me. So back I went to my good friend Ben Botwick. He picked up his Tommygun and said: "Come!" We walked to that store, rang the bell and when the owner appeared, Ben tickled the man's stomach with the gun and told me to repeat my request for clothing. Never have I had better and more courteous service, not even at Levisons, a high-class clothing retailer in Johannesburg. The only existing picture of me taken shortly after the war shows me wearing that new suit, courtesy of the Red Cross and Ben Botwick.

At another time I was in my room when I heard a commotion outside and looking out, saw Ben Botwick walking down the road with a uniformed SS officer in front of him. Walking behind Ben were about twenty Poles, not Jewish, all shouting and gesticulating. I went outside and Ben explained to me that he had been put in charge of a group of German POW's, that the Poles hailed from Auschwitz and claimed to have recognized this officer as one of that camp's guards. They were adamant that Ben should hand over the prisoner to them so that they could administer instant justice.

Ben told me that he was responsible for every prisoner in his charge. He asked me whether I knew the Nazi, which I denied. He then asked me to speak to the Poles in German and to tell them two things: one was that if they tried to lay hands on that prisoner he would shoot them. Secondly, that he knew a Jewish girl from Auschwitz in the DP camp and if she confirmed that this officer was an Auschwitz guard, then the Poles could have him with pleasure. So what does he do with this prisoner in the meantime? He puts me in charge of him.

So there I was, all of 14 years old with a potentially murderous Nazi on my hands who stood to be lynched before the day was out. I took him to my room, gave him a broom and told him to sweep the floor. This must have been a particularly stupid Nazi for he actually did so, instead of immediately making good his escape. I was not armed – perhaps he was shell shocked. The Poles had left with Ben. After about an hour they all returned and Ben told me that he had mentioned the prisoner's name to the Jewish girl and it did not mean anything to her. He relieved me of my Nazi officer and that was the last that I saw of the German. Upon being questioned, the Poles told me that the Jewish girl had probably been this German's mistress, and so had shielded him.

But she was not the only one who had shielded that German. What had stopped me from telling Ben that I also recognized the man as a concentration camp guard, or otherwise prevailing on Ben that here was a chance to take revenge on the hated SS? All I know is that I did not do so and could never have done it.

Otto and I had decided that we needed to strengthen ourselves and would go for long walks in a nearby forest. I used to take with a German army kitbag with a couple of bricks inside for added effort. One day we were roaming through the forest when we came upon a group of armed German soldiers. They took one look at us and one immediately said: "You are Jews, aren't you?" I confirmed this and remember thinking what a silly way this would be to die, but all that they wanted was information on how to avoid American patrols. I sent them in a direction where they would be sure to find some, then asking poor Otto to keep an eye on those Germans, I ran back as fast as I could to the DP camp and alerted the Americans. They promptly manned a couple of jeeps, and taking me with as guide, proceeded at speed along a road leading into the forest. They

were all armed, of course, and as I did not want to find myself in a fight empty handed I grabbed an axe and put it into my belt.

We finally arrived at the place where we had encountered the Germans, only to find Otto there and not a German in sight. He had been too wise to follow those soldiers but was able to indicate in which direction they had gone. Then off we went into the forest, spread out in battle formation, guns and axe at the ready. Suddenly one of the Americans held up his hand, aimed his rifle and fired. My heart nearly stood still. "What did you see?" I asked. "A deer," he said. We never saw those Germans again. Racing back in the jeeps the way we had come we hit a pothole. I shot up into the air and landed on the point of the axe, which had been in my belt, making me the only casualty of the whole exercise. I have my battle scar to this day.

In later years, people to whom I told that story refused to believe that I had actually admitted to being a Jew when those soldiers questioned me. We were no longer wearing our hated yellow stars – perhaps the outlines were still visible on our clothing. I know that it does not make sense, but that is what happened.

But it was not only German soldiers that we found. One day we came across Herbert Klein, the French boy with a dislike for water. It appeared that he had managed to attach himself to a group of French prisoners after we had left the Destruction camp and they had looked after him.

Even more interesting to me was one day finding one of the Jewish Czech boys of the DP camp. He assured me that the other Jewish boys had also survived. The Gypsies I did not even bother to enquire about.

Now those Czech boys had used none of the stratagems that I had employed in order to survive, at least not while I was with them. They had not worked in the cobbler's shop with its extra food and shelter. Had they also received Red Cross parcels? Who had looked after them on the death march? Was it possible that all my efforts at bettering Otto's and my situation had just been a superfluous exercise? Could we have been like boats in a stream with the option to steer towards the left bank or the right, unable to disembark, yet being taken inexorably to our final destination? I shall never know, but am sure of two things: One is that without the active assistance of the Dutch on that march Otto and I would have fallen back to where the guns were, probably with fatal results. The second was my own temperament: for better or worse I was not content to just drift with that current, and had the end result been different, then at least it would not have been through lack of effort on my part.

## **REPATRIATION**

We were now interviewed by members of the Red Cross with a view to repatriation. Both Otto and I stated that we were Dutch. No one could argue with us, we had no papers and there were no witnesses. I don't know what made us lie, other than perhaps maintaining the fiction that had enabled us to gain access to the Dutch barrack in Sachsenhausen. We realized that if any of our families had survived, they would try and return to Holland in the hope of finding someone or even something. It was as well that we did say that we were Dutch; one of the boys of our Hungarian group had become separated from his mother. When questioned after his liberation he told the truth, namely that he had Hungarian nationality. The authorities promptly sent him to Hungary and it took his mother two years before she could get him released by the Communists.

Knowing that we were soon to be repatriated we inquired as to conditions in Holland. It was then that we found out about the widespread starvation there. I, in the meantime, had acquired some souvenirs, German ceremonial swords, daggers etc. Had I been so inclined I could have brought a submachine gun or Luger pistol back with me - I was never searched. Under the circumstances I decided to get rid of all my loot and instead managed to exchange it with the American soldiers for 6 Red Cross parcels, returning to Holland carrying three in each hand. I will never know what excited my Auntie Lenke more when I arrived there, my survival or those parcels.

Nobel now informed me that I should accompany him on the way to Holland. He was kind enough to promise me that should I find none of my family, then I could continue to stay with his. This was a truly "noble" gesture on his part because he also did not know what had become of his wife and three children. Otto on the other hand had an uncle in Holland, his mother's brother, who was married to a Christian woman and who had consequently not been arrested. Otto expected to find this man with a view to getting shelter and assistance.

And so one day we left Lunenburg airport in a military Dakota, and in due course landed in Brussels on our way back home. We had some time to ourselves and wandered around the city admiring both the architecture and our freedom to do so. Suddenly we heard our names called in an excited voice and found ourselves confronted by Jacques. He was overjoyed to see us and lost no time in telling Otto and me that he was now the proud possessor of two houses, probably once owned by his parents. Otto and I looked at each other: "What has become of your mother, Jacques" I asked him. His eyes became evasive and he did not answer. "Your father and older brother were sent to Buchenwald" I persisted. Again he did not answer, but after a few seconds recovered his earlier

enthusiasm and again insisted that we accompany him to see his houses. Saddened we walked away, leaving him standing there.

### HOLLAND.

That evening I arrived with Nobel at his home in Rotterdam, while Otto went on to The Hague to find his uncle. Mrs. Nobel was a dear woman and made me most welcome and after dinner I was shown my room. It had big featherbeds in it and I looked at them, felt them, felt the mattress and then burst out laughing. It took me some time to compose myself.

The following day, leaving my Red Cross parcels at the Nobels, I set out for Schiedam and the van Hultens. I arrived there in the afternoon and with trepidation knocked on the door. How had they fared since my father last saw them in 1943? Mrs. van Hulten opened the door, looking the same as I had remembered her. "It is Don," she said, and then: "We heard from your mother and sister this morning."

Some time after I had been transferred to the Men's camp, my mother went to work at the nearby Siemens factory and with Riva's help she managed to have Irene sent there as well. They stayed at the Siemens labour camp, not in Ravensbruck. The conditions in Siemens were better than in Ravensbruck; if I had still been with my mother and sister, then the transfer to that labour camp could not have taken place. In due course my mother and sister were returned to Ravensbruck when the Siemens camp was evacuated.

Not long thereafter the Hungarian group was informed that they could choose to be sent to the Bergen Belsen concentration camp if they so wished. This episode was rather irregular. The Nazis were not in the habit of allowing one any choice – people were disposed of like so much cattle. The women knew nothing about the conditions in Bergen Belsen, except the fact that it was in the west and therefore more likely to be liberated by the English or Americans than by the Russians. Nearly all the Hungarian women from Holland took this option.

My mother was not so sure. These could be life or death decisions and she had to consider the welfare of her child as well. So acting on intuition she did something that was also highly irregular: She asked one of the SS guards for advice.

Now there was not supposed to be any civil contact between the SS guards and those whom they might be called upon to beat or kill at a moment's notice. The man whom my mother selected was one of the very few whom she had not seen ill-treat a prisoner. My sister was a very beautiful child, allowing for concentration camp conditions. She was fair-skinned, blond and blue-eyed, the very epitome of a young Aryan girl. The guard listened to my mother and then looked at Irene.

"Is this your child?" he asked. Upon hearing the affirmation, he said: "Bleib hier." (Stay), and walked away.

This decision would be their salvation. The Hungarian group that went to Bergen Belsen found themselves in a concentration camp that was rife with typhus and tuberculosis. Many became critically ill and some died, including Otto's mother. When a barrack was infested with typhus it was not uncommon for 99% of its occupants to perish.

In March 1945 my mother heard of a list that was being prepared of all the English prisoners in Ravensbruck. Despite the fact that she and Irene were registered as Hungarians, she took a chance and had her name and Irene's entered on that list. Later in April the Red Cross evacuated them to Sweden and in due course my mother contacted the van Hultens.

A fellow prisoner drew my mother's attention to this list. She was a Chinese lady called Nadine Wang who claimed to have been a colonel in Chiang Kai-shek's army. Before the Swedish Red Cross evacuated the English prisoners, my mother and Irene went to take their leave of Nadine Wang and to thank her for what may well have been the gift of their lives. None of them knew what future lay ahead. Nadine Wang was not a young woman and had no children. She asked my mother that if all went well and Irene married and became a mother herself, that she should be reminded of what had happened on this occasion. If the infant were a girl, then Nadine Wang would appreciate it if Irene would name the child after her. Irene's daughter is called Ronit Nadine.

I now began to alternate my sojourn between the Nobels, the van Hultens and my Auntie Lenke. I learned that Lenke and her husband Baczi had survived by being in hiding during the war. Holland was still in the grip of hunger, food was rationed and my Red Cross parcels were duly divided between those three families. I got on very well with all of them, although my childhood friend, Jan van Hulten, who was one year younger than I, would tell me years later that he felt that I was at least 25 years older than he when I returned in 1945. I still kept in touch with Otto and we would go for long walks together. His younger brother and sister had survived Bergen Belsen and were to join him in The Hague eventually.

Otto and his brother and sister did not remain in Holland. Their uncle and aunt decided that they could not cope with them. A Jewish Dutch family, who had all survived the war despite the husband having been in Auschwitz, then took in Otto, Rudi and Emmy. So grateful was this family for the miracle of their survival, that they gathered orphans from all over Holland, giving them eleven children in all including their own. They emigrated to Israel when the state was established and were sent to the Kibbutz Givat Brenner. Otto changed his name to Menachem Kallus and joined the airforce. He was a member of the Israeli

contingent in Uganda, become friendly with a major Idi Amin, and is now settled near Haifa as a businessman with his own family.

Mr. Nobel had meanwhile returned to his work as a police photographer in Rotterdam. I was staying with him when I saw him return from work one day with a large envelope. I asked him what was in there and he said that the envelope contained photos that he had taken in his line of work and that it was best that I did not see them. I replied that he knew very well that I was used to scenes of violence. Later that evening as we were sitting around the table having dinner, he got up and, approaching me from behind, he reached over my shoulder and put a photo in front of my face. It was the picture of an old lady sitting in her chair with her throat cut. I knocked it right out of his hand. That was when I began to realize that my reactions were slowly returning to normal.

None of the people that I stayed with thought it necessary to send me for a medical or psychiatric examination. I behaved "normally", was not sick, and I suppose that Post Traumatic Stress Disorder had not yet been heard of. My uncle Pityu had meanwhile returned from the camps. He had no definite news of my father or of his other two brothers who had been in Buchenwald, but informed me that he did not believe that they were still alive. They had become too weak to work, had been put on a transport.... Some time after Pityu's return my mother would receive confirmation of my father's death through the Red Cross. Of the seventy relatives that my father had in Europe before the war only ten survived. This meant that I had lost my grandmother and nearly all my uncles, aunts and cousins plus my friends that I had known since early childhood.

With a few exceptions the Germans kept records of the names and dates when people died or were murdered in the camps. In due course this information was computerized by the Yad Vashem institute in Jerusalem and became available to the public. These details not only served the purpose of ascertaining the fate of many of the missing people but also to gainsay the calumny that the Holocaust was a myth and that there had never been gas chambers. Neo Nazis would admit that Jews had died in concentration camps, but only as a result of diseases such as typhus which effected the German population as well.

As I am typing this I have in front of me a photostatic extract from the Yad Vashem records. It concerns the details of people by the name of Krausz, when and where they were born and died. It is by no means comprehensive - my father's name does not even appear on it. That list shows the names of my uncle Jenö, his wife and two children, all perished on the same day, 13-3-1943, in Sobibor, my aunt Etah and her twin children, all dead on the 27-8-1943 in Auschwitz. When there are no battles or bombings and whole families die on the same day, then that is not disease, it is murder.

I am chairman of the Association of Holocaust Survivors in Johannesburg. Our membership is drawn from survivors of nearly every part of Europe. Their lives after the war showed a common pattern. With few exceptions they returned to their countries of origin in the usually vain hope of finding other survivors of their family. When such hopes had been shattered and realizing that those who had often killed their families and then stolen their possessions and property were threatening them with death as well, they fled to the West.

Holocaust deniers have been adamant that the figure of 6 million victims is a gross exaggeration concocted to draw the maximum of sympathy and reparations. I am sure that if my father and the 60 members of his family that are on record as having perished were still alive, they would also return. If the Holocaust is just a myth or a gruesome ploy to gain benefits, then where are those people?

One day I was walking in Rotterdam when I saw the Italian boy Pietro that I had rescued at school, the boy whose parents were Nazis. He gave a joyful shout when he saw me: "Don, you are still alive!" There was something in those words that touched a very raw nerve. "Yes," I said, "I am still alive," and walked on.

Nine years later, in 1954, I returned to Holland from South Africa, and while in Rotterdam I went to see what had happened to my old school. The city had largely been rebuilt, street names had changed and canals filled in, everything was different. I made my way to one of the few landmarks that I could still recognize, the hospital on the Cool Singel. From here I had walked the same route every day, five times a week from 1937 to 1941. My enquiries as to the whereabouts of the school brought no response, so I began to walk slowly in what I thought was the right direction. Then I had a feeling that I should turn left and did so; a while later I turned right, again on impulse. Soon I found myself standing in front of the school. It had been turned into a laundry, the street name had been changed, but so ingrained was the habit of 5 years, that I could probably have found that building blindfolded.

During 1942 my parents made arrangements with a farmer in the village of Terbregge that we could spend our nights there. The village was close to Rotterdam, and I suspect that the purpose of our staying there may have been twofold: to escape the almost nightly air raids and avoid the raids on Jews. Both plans failed. During one air raid a bomber that was being pursued by a German fighter released its bomb load on Terbregge, and the evening that the Germans raided our home, they found us in situ.

I do not remember the name of that Dutch farmer. He made a living from growing produce on about one acre, had a clean, neat little home, a friendly wife and a son about my age. He was a very religious man and I remember him taking me

to task for using some of my Rotterdam street expressions in his house. My mother stored linen and household silver at his place.

After the war my mother suggested that I visit that farmer and see whether any of our possessions could be retrieved. I was instructed that if nothing was left, then that would not matter. The Dutch had suffered terribly during the last winter of the war, with between 20,000 and 50,000 dying from hunger. If our belongings were still there, then I should bring back the silver and make these good people a gift of the linen. In due course van Hulten and I arrived. The farmer and his wife then took us up to the room that we had used, opened a cupboard and proudly showed us my mother's effects exactly as she had left them.

My memory of the Dutch people has been a very happy one. I lived there for twelve years and not once did I have an anti-Semitic experience or hear a derogatory remark for being a Jew. There are not many Jews of European origin that can say this. During 1980 my wife and I visited Holland and went to Amsterdam. I had learned that during the war the Nazis would concentrate the Jews of Amsterdam in a theatre called the Schouwburg and from there send them to Westerbork. This building had been converted into a memorial and I wanted to visit it. Despite having been given the address I could not find the place and eventually asked a man in the street whether he could direct me. That he did, and then suddenly took my arm and said: "I hope that you find what you are looking for." He was not a Jew, and the empathy and compassion of his gesture nearly made me weep.

Here in South Africa we have a few Dutch people that rescued Jews. One is a most remarkable Dutchman called Jaap van Proosdij who at the time of writing lives in Pretoria. As vice chairman of the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial Association I played a role in having him recognized officially as a Righteous Gentile and he received all the honour and rewards that he deserved. Some time thereafter our Holocaust survivors in Johannesburg had a reception for him at which he addressed us.

That man had been employed at the Gestapo headquarters and had used his official position there to rescue some 200 Jews. Had he been caught then I have no doubt that he would have been tortured and shot.

He was asked why he had risked his life, and he became quite agitated. "If you see someone drowning," he said: "Then what are you going to do? Just stand there?"

In my speech of appreciation and gratitude I pointed out what actions such as his had meant to us. We were engulfed in the darkest of nights, hated, despised and abandoned by the whole world, condemned to terrible suffering and death. Suddenly there comes a person such as he, like a shining light, and risks his life

to save ours. I also told him how much I envied him. In the Jewish religion the act of saving one person's life is compared to saving the whole world; he had succeeded in saving 200. I am pleased to say that he was very moved.

## **ENGLAND**

After I had been back in Holland for about five months, my mother received the necessary papers and travel permits to bring me to England. I had been independent for about a year now, and when I found no one to meet me at the airport, I made my way through unknown London to the address that I had been given. I arrived there long before my mother and Aunt Sue returned from a vain search of London's airports. It was a happy reunion although we did not have much to say to each other at first. My mother's brother Harry came out from South Africa and rented a house for us in Margate where we stayed for a year until we could receive residence permits for South Africa. I was sent to Chatham High School in Ramsgate and was very happy there.

Some time after arriving in England I awoke one morning to find that I was unable to walk. No doctor could find a plausible explanation for this, other than the fact that I had flat feet for which I began to receive treatment. This condition persisted in varying severity for a few months and was never diagnosed. Many years later, when I became a member of the Association of Jewish Holocaust Survivors in Johannesburg, I was to find that these symptoms were not uncommon amongst survivors, a nervous reaction perhaps. Puzzling is the fact that during the previous months in Holland I had been hiking all over the area where I lived. Holland was still wartime territory, at least in my mind, and there were still problems with getting enough food. I think that it was only when I arrived in England that I felt that I could afford to relax/collapse.

I had another strange experience in Margate. We lived just near the coast and my bedroom overlooked the sea. One night I awoke to find myself back in the Ravensbruck Men's camp. It was half past three in the morning, time to get up. I heard the voices of the others in my barrack, and there was the cry of: "Kafee holen!" for those who had the task of bringing the "coffee". I got up and began to get dressed, aware of the usual sounds in a concentration camp barrack. But intermingled with all those noises was a sound that I could not identify - it was the sound of the sea, and I remember walking to my window and looking out in order to convince myself of the reality.

## **SOUTH AFRICA**

In June 1946 I arrived in South Africa, having been brought out by my mother's family. My mother and sister only joined me some months later.

My mother went to work in the lingerie factory that my uncle owned and Irene and I were sent to school. I attended Highlands North High School in Johannesburg and through my cousins was introduced to the Habonim Zionist Youth movement. The latter reminded me of the Onegei Shabbat that I had celebrated in Westerbork and the friends that I had known there, nearly all of whom were no more. The first time that I went to a Habonim meeting with its dancing and Hebrew melodies I cried like a baby. Even today, more than half a century later, I find a Jewish function involving children an emotional experience.

School was another matter. In my earlier school days I had never had difficulty in making friends, but no longer. I found that the way of life, thoughts and behaviour of my contemporaries were superficial and could not work up any enthusiasm for chasing after a ball. But then I did not seem to need friends. For decades I never made a close friend, one whose company I would seek. I would belong to various organizations and participate in their functions or outings, but if there was no such function then a book would also do. Later in Rhodesia a number of us would go camping and hiking; if I wanted to go and someone wished to come with, good and well, otherwise I would pack my tent and go off into the bush on my own. In fact I began to value these solitary climbing and camping expeditions more than the ones where I had company. Over the years I would find that I had more in common with the parents of my contemporaries than with boys of my own age.

At school the Jewish boys in my class seemed to consider me an embarrassment. I did not play sport, spoke with an accent and generally had very little in common with them. Around 1948 there was a lot of antagonism against the Jews because of the acts of the Irgun and the Stern gang in Palestine. We had an English teacher, Miss Barnes, who one day treated us to a lecture on the debt that Jews owed England. About a quarter of the boys in my class were Jewish and not one said a word. I stood up and asked this teacher why these saviours of the Jews had allowed so few Jewish refugees to escape from Hitler, why the gaschambers had never been bombed, etc. She told me that I did not know what I was talking about and that I should sit down. I refused and explained why I knew exactly what I was talking about. Then to my amazement the Jewish boys in the class started telling me to sit down and shut up. I suppose that this was all rather awkward for them. At the end of that period, as I left the classroom, I found all the Christian boys waiting for me, and thought that they wanted to attack me. They looked at me and one said quietly: "Tell us about those camps." I think that I spoke to them for about a quarter of an hour.

We had a sports teacher there, an Afrikaans man who was rumoured to have belonged to the Ossewa Brandwag, an organization that had sympathized with the Nazis during the war. When the sports period arrived, all the boys who were already involved left the class for their respective teams. The boys who remained were the ones who did not know how to play any ball games, such as

my self, or boys who could not participate for health reasons. One such period our sports teacher arrived with two pairs of boxing gloves, and, separating the Jewish from the Christian children, he began to pair us off according to size. The Jews would have to fight the non-Jews.

I had seen something like this before and it made my blood boil. The intention was usually to humiliate and beat up the Jews and to show what cowards they were. A boy called Schoeman and I were the first ones to be picked, while the Jewish kids looked on with apprehension. I am afraid that I hit poor Schoeman harder than I had ever hit anybody and I still remember the look of surprise on his face. It became a good, furious fight, with each giving as much as he got. Meanwhile, the Jewish children, newly inspired, were dancing around us shouting encouragement at me. The teacher stopped the fight, took away the gloves, and never tried this again. It had not worked. An interesting aspect of this episode was Schoeman. I never again had anything to do with him, but thereafter, if I was in trouble with other boys, he would materialize next to me and tell my opponent: "Him you leave alone."

In the years that followed I went to boxing and Judo classes, while in Rhodesia I took up shooting and became proficient with both rifle and pistol. My initial motivation was that never again would some thugs haul me away from my home or assault me if I could help it. Later I became interested in those activities as sports.

All in all I remained a loner, and for a long time I was not at ease with my peers. I was probably an angry young man and to this day experience feelings of aggression.

Many years afterwards, when I was in my fifties, I would become a member of the Jewish Holocaust Survivors Association and frequently lecture on my experiences. One such episode is worth recounting.

I had only been a member of the Association for a short time, when one day I found the secretary allocating speakers to various Jewish High schools. This amused me and I asked what the point was in telling a Jewish audience about the Holocaust; why not rather go and speak at the German school? She said: "You think so? Then you go and speak there."

I phoned the headmaster of the Sans Soucci Deutsche Schule, told him that I was a Jewish concentration camp survivor and that I would like to come and have a chat with him. He was agreeable and we had a 45-minute conversation. I asked him whether he had heard of the Holocaust. He had and felt very bad about it. Did he teach it as part of the curriculum at his school and if so, how? He told me that he did teach it together with teaching about the Communist persecution and murder of the Kulaks (the Russian peasants who owned their

own farms and of whom Stalin murdered about 5 million). Hardly a fair comparison, but better than nothing. Then I came to the point; I felt that they owed it to me to let me tell my story. The headmaster did not think that this was such a good idea; it could cost him his job. He suggested that he should first discuss it with his staff and then come back to me, and with that we parted amicably. I felt that he had let himself off the hook and doubted whether I would hear from him again, but at least I had tried.

About two weeks later he asked me to come and meet the history teachers of the school. I suspected that I might have to deal with Holocaust denial, and asked one of our survivors to accompany me. She was Leah Leibowitz and was working on a degree in Holocaust Studies. Leah had been in Auschwitz, where her husband and 7-year old child had been murdered.

Those German teachers received us with quiet hostility. One even refused to shake my hand on being introduced. They expressed the opinion that the Holocaust was a most terrible event, that they felt ashamed about it and that they could imagine how we felt. However, the German children at the school had not even been born when the whole tragedy took place and under no circumstances could they allow us to victimize them in any way. It was then that Leah made a remark that I have never forgotten. She told those Germans that they need not worry: never would she do to a child of theirs what had been done to hers. Then she burst into tears.

After much discussion I eventually did speak at that school, but without Leah. On occasion I have had to spend up to an hour and three quarters just answering questions - those standard nine and ten German children had only one question for me: "Do you hate us?" I told them the truth: I didn't.

But I also had a question: I said that after what I had told them about concentration camps and the Holocaust, did they not feel that those responsible should be punished? To this they would not answer. The headmaster told me afterwards that had he known what I was going to say, he would never have allowed me to speak. What had he expected?

The children asking whether I hated them was understandable, but in doing so, who were they sorry for, themselves or me? Not answering my question did not surprise me either; whom would they have had to condemn - their parents and grandparents?

When the teachers interviewed Leah and me, there was one spokeswoman. After my talk she was given the task of escorting me off the premises. We were talking as we walked, when suddenly I detected something in her topic of conversation that made me stop in my stride. I turned to face her and said: "Listen, let's forget about Jews for a moment. What did Hitler ever do for you?"

You lost half your country, you suffered at least 5 million dead, your cities were pulverized and your reputation as a civilized nation no longer exists. What did Hitler do for you?" She looked at me in amazement and did not answer. I thought to myself: "It is now 40 years since the war ended. This is an intelligent woman. Can it be possible that what I have just said has never crossed her mind?"

Neither I nor any other Jewish concentration camp survivor was allowed to speak again at the Deutsche Schule for another 20 years.

I was walking in Johannesburg not far from where I live when I smelt a concentration camp. Had I been asked to describe such an odour I could not have done so. If one enters a smelly place one notices the smell – after being there for a while one does not, but it registers on the subconscious. I looked around for the source and saw the carcass of a dog lying in the gutter. Then I knew what concentration camps smelled like.

Once I was asked whether I wished to meet a man who had liberated a concentration camp. In due course I found myself facing a short, well-built, grey-haired man who had commanded a Russian tank unit during the war. After the war he had made his way to Israel and served as a colonel in the Israeli army. He confirmed that he had liberated a camp.

I told him about my background and mentioned that we camp inmates had spent much time fantasizing about our possible liberation. Would he mind if I described how I imagined the sequence of events before he commenced his account? Then the following conversation ensued:

I said: "You are a Jew. You are in command of a column of tanks. You hear that there is a concentration camp in the vicinity and know that time is of the essence. People are dying there daily. So you **SMASH** your way through those German lines and you liberate those people!"

He looked at me quietly: "No," he said, "It wasn't like that. You see, we were looking for a vodka factory and when we saw the chimney of the crematorium on the horizon we thought that that was it."

"What did you find there?" I asked him.

"Skeletons," he said, "Walking skeletons."

"Then what did you do?"

"Oh, we rounded up the guards and put them into the ovens."

"Alive?!"

"Sure."

## **CONCLUSION.**

How have I been affected in my person and beliefs by the Holocaust?

I lost my father, my family, my childhood, plus more than four years of schooling, which I was never able to make up. At the age of 16 I was placed in Form I together with the 12-year-olds and then rushed in one year through to Form III. There was emotional damage; apart from an inability to relate to people, I have had to seek psychiatric help and have been diagnosed as suffering from a post traumatic stress disorder. To this day I undergo therapy and take medication to alleviate anxiety and depression.

The loss of some four years of secondary schooling may well have caused me to fail the matriculation exam, and with that any chance of tertiary education. On the other hand, the lessons learned during two and a half years of being in concentration camps I could not have acquired in any university.

In the camps we had access to Nazi newspapers and were continuously bombarded with propaganda on the camp broadcasting system. As a result I found soon after the war that I had to de-Nazify myself, to review my thinking, especially as far as my co-religionists were concerned.

What should my attitude be towards the Germans? Should I hate them one and all? That would mean that I regarded them as they had regarded us Jews and I did not want any part of Nazi thinking. I came to the conclusion that the fault did not lie so much with the character of a people, as with its background, history, economic circumstances and religion. In other words, if any other people on earth were to find themselves in the situation in which the Germans were between 1918 and 1933, then there would be every possibility of a Hitler arising and looking around for a scapegoat for his country's dilemma. The Germans may well have been victims of circumstance.

When I meet a person today I look at the face, and if that pleases me, then I am not interested in the nationality, race, colour, accent or religion of that individual. I will relate to him or her as one human being to another.

How were my religious beliefs affected? The first time that I picked up a Jewish prayer book after the war and saw that I was expected to pray to the Merciful, the Compassionate, I had difficulty. I could not believe in this concept. I was told that my survival and that of my mother and sister was nothing short of miraculous and that for that reason alone I should give praise. And say what? "I am all right, Jack" and offer up thanks for a providence that included the murder of my father, his family and about 6 million Jews? There might be a Creator, but did He care for the individual? Was there really someone at the other end of the line when one prayed? I discussed this with many rabbis, even entering into correspondence with one in Israel and via TV in America. None of their answers satisfied me.

What explanation did Judaism have for the Holocaust? I found out that there were several. The Holocaust was a punishment from God because the Jews had assimilated, especially the German Jews. But half of Germany's Jews managed to emigrate. Fully 80 to 90 percent of the world's rabbis and Talmudic students were murdered in the Holocaust - were they also assimilated? One of the countries with the greatest number of assimilated Jews in the world today is the USA where we have lost more Jews through assimilation than we lost to Hitler. The Holocaust took place in Europe, not America.

Then there was Jewish mysticism, the idea of Gilgul, or reincarnation. Those who had sinned in previous lives would be reborn as European Jews in order to atone in a concentration camp or gas chamber. Very plausible, very facile provided that one believed in previous lives and transmigrating souls. Jews have existed since the time of Abraham, some 3,300 years, and this atonement should have been an ongoing process. Why should it have reached its culmination only in the twentieth century?

God gave Man free will; without it he would not be Man as we know him. Free will meant that he was free to do good or evil, with God as a bystander. If so, then what was the purpose in praying to this no longer omnipotent God? Here too I was given an answer: prayer was a positive manifestation, to be used to align oneself with the forces of good, and by doing so, to counteract the many negative influences in the world.

My Rabbi in Israel wrote that God was not powerless in the face of Man's free will. He could and would have intervened, but the 6 million Jews were not righteous enough. One and a half million children were not righteous enough.....?

The Holocaust enabled the state of Israel to be established, which, hopefully, would prevent future Holocausts. Perhaps. But at the time that the state of Israel was created it had approximately 650 000 Jewish inhabitants. Even at this time of writing, 1989, there are no more than about 4 million Jews living in Israel. Does their rescue and safe guarding justify the murder of 6 million men, women and children? Hardly a cost effective exercise.

I am afraid that whatever avenue I trod, no matter what I read, I remained with the conclusion that I was able to understand the Holocaust far better by taking God right out of the picture. I acknowledge that this is also a reflection on my ability to absorb and comprehend.

The Holocaust is said to be incomprehensible. I find that I can understand it as an act of Man, but not as an act of God.

The year is now 2005 and an earthquake in Asia and resulting Tsunami have killed approximately 300,000 people. It has been pointed out that this cannot be described as an act of Man, and therefore must be an act of God. Why not an act of Nature?

Radio 702 asked me on two occasions to participate in their chat shows in my capacity as chairman of the survivors association in Johannesburg. As you will know, a chat show starts with a brief introduction of the speaker and an interview, after which any one can phone in and ask questions. And so I once again encountered the old admonition that it was time for Jews to forgive and forget. (Isn't it time that **you people**," etc).

My answer to the enquirer was that 2000 years ago a man was crucified in Jerusalem, ostensibly by Jews. During all this period that matter has not been forgiven or forgotten, but 40 years after 6 million Jews have been murdered, people have the audacity to tell us to forgive and forget. Forget we cannot; it is a physical impossibility. And why should one forgive the murderers and the face-averting bystanders for the Holocaust, including the unbelievably brutal annihilation of one and a half million children? It was unforgivable!

It is now 1992, and to this day I cannot see a film on the Holocaust without weeping. I am an adult - should I weep? But what would I be if I could not shed a tear for the murder of all those men, women and children? We survivors found straight after the war that we could not cry. One survivor told me how he was a witness when a group of children picked up a hand grenade and blew themselves to pieces. When the distraught relatives found him standing there without showing emotion, they assaulted him.

Christians said that the Holocaust had happened because Jews refused to accept Jesus as the Messiah. But no people were more devout Christians than the Poles and they lost about two and a half million of their number. What about the Russians with their losses of at least 20 million; was this because they were all godless communists? And if there was such a thing as divine retribution for evil upon which some of the above ideas are based, then where was the retribution on the Germans? They became one of the most prosperous nations in the world and sentenced an occasional Nazi to 4 years jail for involvement in the murder of 6000 Jews (i.e. 6 hours jail per murder.)

I began to feel that I should not look up to the heavens for answers but rather around me to my fellow man. I have described people who showed both good and evil tendencies, and because of the circumstances that I found myself in, I was able to notice similar proclivities in myself. Today I believe that it is more a matter of social engineering and economics rather than Theology if we wish to eradicate evil from society.

I did not arrive at these conclusions overnight. When Judaism gave me no answers I looked elsewhere and spent 7 years attending weekly sessions practicing Raja Yoga and studying the Bhagavat Gita. Eventually I asked myself: "I am a Jew and what do I have to show for it? Two and a half years concentration camp?" So I started attending Jewish bible classes and studying the Talmud. Whether I was able to believe or not, I found more intelligent and moral thinking in Judaism than in anything else that I had encountered. Also, I had no intention of finishing Hitler's work for him and believe that Jewish children should be reared with the values that inspired their forefathers.

There is another question to which I have no answer: Why did we survive? Why, at a time when the Germans were gassing 15,000 Hungarian Jews *a day* in Auschwitz, were we left to survive in the concentration camps? Was it that our group of 80 Hungarians was hardly worth the effort? Ravensbruck and Sachsenhausen did not lack facilities for killing people and there was a gas chamber in the former camp during the last months of the war. Was our file misplaced? We shall never know.

I do believe that as a Holocaust survivor I have an obligation not to forget, and to bear witness, to testify to what I saw and experienced. There were about 250,000 of us that are known to have survived - we and we alone know what we experienced; it is we who must speak for those millions of men, women and children who are no more and whose voices will never be heard again.

And so I have been lecturing since 1985 to any audience that I can find: Jewish, Christian, Moslem, Black, religious or otherwise, schools, universities, adults, all over South Africa and even in Zimbabwe. If there is an anti-Semitic incident at a school I either volunteer to speak to the children, or the Jewish community sends me there together with others. I have been invited to join the Media Team under the auspices of the Zionist Federation, and we monitor the press, TV and radio for matters that are anti-Semitic or anti-Israel. Then we respond.

Not long after arriving in South Africa, I corresponded with Ben Botwick in America, and wrote to my two Norwegian friends from Ravensbruck through the Red Cross. They too had survived.

One final item. Our Czech friend and benefactor in Ravensbruck, Riva Fridova, survived the war and returned to Czechoslovakia. My mother wrote to her there and received a letter stating that she was well and in which she asked my mother please not to write to her again. She had exchanged the hell of the Nazis for the terror of the Communists.